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FORCE FEEDING

A YOUNG lady who happens to like GALAXY is distressed because her family and friends jeer at her for reading science fiction. She unhappily wonders whether detailing the scientific qualifications of our writers may not compel their respect.

Well, Asimov is a biochemist specializing in cancer research; Heinlein is an engineer; Tenn is an anthropologist; de Camp, as a patent authority, is familiar with many branches of science; Guin, connected with a large pharmaceutical house, is a medical expert . . .

The list could be extended in almost every scientific direction —and, I think, would do no good.

GALAXY ran into a similar situation when it was recently interviewed on TV, with a noted mystic to provide "conflict." Summing up at the end of the program, this gentleman stated that science fiction is a cheap substitute for prophecy.

To such calcified thinking, there was no contradiction in making this deeply thoughtful statement over a medium that had been anticipated—*not* predicted—generations ago in science fiction, with people thousands of miles away seeing and hearing him at the exact instant he burbled his dictum.

Selling him science fiction might have been possible if we were extrapolating possible developments in metaphysics. I'm not even sure of that. He probably doesn't think any advance in his specialty is either likely or necessary.

Oddly, I can see him, or his colleagues, setting up shop on the planets when we reach them—as we seem certain to do—and not changing that opinion or their primitive "science" in any degree whatever.

This is admittedly an extreme case of fossilization. In the example of our reader's family or friends, we have people who are unwonderingly alive in a society that to their ancestors would have been pure science fiction. They, of course, take every advance as perfectly natural.

Yet each advance was "impossible" before it came about. And then *that* one was possible, but the *next* wasn't!

Should they be educated to an appreciation of science fiction? Why bother?

I wish I had noted the author who said that no idea is as powerful as one whose time has come. Science fiction is in that position.

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Its arrival is a matter of logical evolution. How widespread its influence may become is difficult to determine now, but surely it will find a legitimate and enduring place in literature.

Beyond seeing that the favorite magazines of readers are prominently displayed on newsstands, and passing the word to receptive people, not much else has to be done. The young lady is obviously concerned with gaining approval; that's a personal problem I can't handle, one that is probably unnecessary—certainly not a good betting proposition—and not a question of survival for science fiction.

Its day, as I said, has come. Fighting the popular acceptance of science fiction now is as foolhardy as were our attempts to sell it prematurely. At that time, we were forcing something for which there was no current need.

We were, in other words, pushing evolution, which does not respond gratifyingly to untimely pressure.

Two such instances are the movement for spelling reform and Communism. For different reasons, both are guilty of trying to force evolution.

Language needs no compulsion to change. It does so constantly; if need be, over the dead bodies of lexicographers and pedants.

It changes when there is a need for change, not because someone decides that it should.

Much of our vocabulary would be incomprehensible to anyone of 50 years ago, let alone Chaucer's age. It may be that TV and movies will impair the spelling ability of future generations — though not necessarily their literacy, which, in the sense of vicarious experience, could imaginably be greater than ever before.

In that case, what we might regard as poor spelling would become standard, through common usage.

Regrettable? No. Inevitable, if it does happen. The premature proponents of simplified spelling would, no doubt, feel victorious, but actually their efforts would not influence the change.

Communism, on the other hand, puts a gun to evolution's back. You can't shoot evolution if it refuses to obey. This strange and repugnant wedding of allegedly advanced politics with medieval methods of inquisition runs counter to evolution. From slavery to feudalism to democracy, the direction has been toward greater and greater personal freedom.

We are assured that that is Communism's ultimate goal. But where are the signs of it?

My money is on evolution.

—H. L. GOLD

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Man, it would appear, can adapt to any form of society . . . but not one in which the knowledge of extending life becomes a passport to death!

Category Phoenix

By BOYD ELLANBY

THE door-knob turned, then rattled.

Dr. David Wong stepped out from behind the large bookcase, listening. He pressed the brass handle of the top shelf and the case silently pivoted back to become part of the wall, obliterating the dark passage behind it.

An imperative knocking began at the door; David walked softly to his desk and picked up his notebook. He tried to remain relaxed, but he could feel the tightening of his shoulder muscles. With his right hand, he shut his notebook and concealed it under a mass of papers, while his left hand pressed the desk button to release the lock of the door.

The door burst open and two men strode in, a black-uniformed Ruler followed by a watchguard. Black-visored cap still on his head, the first man marched to the desk and spoke without ceremonial greeting.

"The door was locked, Dr. Wong?"

"Correct, Dr. Lanza. The door was locked."

"I shall have to instruct the guard to report it. Have you forgotten Leader Marley's Maxim: Constructive science does not skulk behind locked doors?"

Wong leaned back in his chair and smiled at his visitors.

Illustrated by EMSH

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"The wisdom of Leader Marley is a constant help to us all, but his generosity is also a byword. Surely you remember that on the tenth anniversary of his accession, he honored me by the grant of occasional hours of Privacy, as a reward for my work on Blue Martian Fever?"

"I remember now," said Dr. Lanza.

"But what for?" asked Officer Blagun. "It's anti-social!"

"Evidently you have forgotten, Officer Blagun, another Maxim of Leader Marley: Nature has not equipped one Category to judge the needs of another; only the Leader understands all. Now, Dr. Lanza, will you tell me the reason for this visit? Since your promotion from Research to Ruler, I have rarely been honored by your attention."

"I am here with a message," said Lanza. "Leader Marley's compliments, and he requests your presence at a conference on next Wednesday at ten in the morning."

"Why did you have to deliver that in person? What's wrong with using Communications?"

"It's not my province to ask questions, Dr. Wong. I was told to come here, and I was told to wait for a reply."

"Next Wednesday at ten? Let's see, this is Friday." David Wong pressed the key of his electronic calendar, but he had no need to study the dull green and red lights that flashed on to indicate the pattern of his day. He did not delude himself that he had any real choice, but he had learned in the past fifteen years that it kept up his courage to preserve at least the forms of independence. He allowed a decent thirty seconds to ponder the coded lights, then blanked the board and looked up with an easy smile.

"Dr. Wong's compliments to Leader Marley, and he will be honored to attend a conference on Wednesday at ten."

Nodding his head, Dr. Lanza glanced briefly around the office. "Queer, old-fashioned place you have here."

"Yes. It was built many years ago by a slippery old politician who wanted to be safe from his enemies. Makes a good place for Research, don't you think?"

Lanza did not answer. He strode to the door, then paused to look back.

"You understand, Dr. Wong, that I shall have to report the locked door? I have no choice."

"Has anyone?"

Officer Blagun followed his superior, leaving the door wide open behind them. Wong remained rigid in his chair until the clack of heels on marble floor had become a mere echo in his

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brain, then stretched out his hand to the intercom. He observed with pride that his hand did not tremble as he pressed the dial.

"Get me Dr. Karl Haslam . . . Karl? Can you meet me in the lab right away? I've thought of a new approach that might help us crack the White Martian problem. Yes, I know we planned on conferring tomorrow, but it's getting later than you think."

Again he pressed the dial. "Get me Leah Hachovnik. Leah? I've got some new stuff to dictate. Be a good girl and come along right away."

Breaking the connection, he drew out his notebook and opened it.

David Wong was a big man, tall, well-muscled, compact, and he might have been handsome but for a vague something in his appearance. His lean face and upcurving mouth were those of a young man; his hair was a glossy black, too thick to be disciplined into neatness; and he was well-dressed, except for the unfashionable bulging of his jacket pocket, where he carried a bulky leather case of everfeed pens and notebooks. But it was his eyes that were disconcerting —an intense blue, brilliant and direct, they had a wisdom and a comprehension that seemed incongruous in so young a face.

A worried frown creased his forehead as he turned back to one of the first pages, studying the symbols he had recorded there, but he looked up without expression on hearing the tapping of slender heels.

"Quick work, Leah. How are you this morning?"

"As if anybody cared!" Leah Hachovnik settled down before the compact stenograph machine, her shoulders slumped, her thin mouth drooping at the corners.

"Feel like working?" said David.

"As much as I ever do, I guess. Sometimes I wonder if the traitors in the granite quarries have it any worse than I do. Sometimes I wish I'd been born into some other Category. Other people have all the luck. I don't know what it is, Dr. Wong, but I just don't seem to have the pep I used to have. Do you think it could be the climate here in New York?"

"People do grow older, Leah," he reminded her gently.

"I know. But Tanya—you remember my twin sister Tanya, the one that got so sick that time, ten years ago, when you did that experiment with Blue Martian Fever, and she had to be sent out to Arizona? Of course I haven't ever seen her since then—people in Office Category never get permission for that kind of travel—but she writes me that ever since

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she got well again she feels just like a kid, and works as hard as she ever did, and she still seems to enjoy life. Why, she's had three proposals of marriage this past year alone, she says, and yet she's thirty-five, just the same age as I am—being twins, you know?—and nobody's proposed to me in ages. Well, I'm certainly going to try to find out what her method is. She's coming back tomorrow."

"She's *what?*"

"Coming back. BureauMed is sending her back here to the Institute to take up her old job in Intercom. Funny they haven't told you, her being an old employee and all."

Dr. Wong was gripping his notebook in stiff fingers, but he replied easily, "Oh, well, BureauMed is a complex organization. With all they have to do, it's not surprising they get things mixed up sometimes."

"Don't I know!" she sighed, and droned on in a dreary monotone. "This one institute alone would turn your hair gray before your time. I don't know how some people seem to keep so young. I was just thinking to myself this morning when I watched you walking through the office, 'Why, Dr. Wong doesn't seem to age a bit! He looks just as young as he ever did, and look at me!' "

Looking at her, David admitted to himself, was not the pleasure it had once been. Ten years ago, she and her twin sister Tanya had been plump, delectable, kittenish girls, their mental equipment no more than standard for Office Category, of course, but their physical appearance had been outstanding, almost beautiful enough for Theater Category. Creamy ivory skin, gray eyes, and soft red hair dramatized by a freakish streak of white that shot abruptly back from the center of the forehead, Tanya's swirling to the left, and Leah's to the right, one girl the mirror image of the other.

But the Leah sitting before him now was thin and tired-looking, her sallow skin was lined, and her soft voice had become vinegary with disappointments. Her red hair had faded to a commonplace brown, and the white streak in the center was yellowed. An unwanted, souring old maid. But there was only one response to make.

"You look fine to me, Leah," he said. "What time did you say your sister is coming?"

"Tomorrow evenings' Playground Jet. Why?"

"We'll have to think of a way to celebrate. But right now, I'd like to get started on my new paper. I've got to meet Dr. Haslam before long."

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"I know." She raised her faded gray eyes. "That was a funny thing you said to him just now over the intercom. You said to him it was getting late. But it isn't late. It's only eleven o'clock in the morning."

David stared. "Do you mean to say you were listening to our conversation? Why did you do that?"

She fidgeted and turned away from him. "Oh, I just happened to be at Comdesk and I guess the circuit wasn't closed. Does it matter? But it seemed a funny thing for you to say."

"People in Office Category are not supposed to understand Research," he said severely. "If they were capable of Research, Leader Marley's planners would have placed them there. As for its being late, it is, as far as White Martian Fever is concerned. Which is the subject of my paper. Prepare to take dictation."

Shrugging her shoulders, she poised her bony fingers over the keys of the little machine.

"Paper for delivery at the Summer Seminar," he began.

"But, Dr. Wong, that doesn't have to be ready for three months yet!"

"Miss Hachovnik! Please remember Leader Marley's Maxim: Individuals born into Office Category are the bone and muscle of the State; Nature has designed them to act, not to think."

"Yes, Dr. Wong. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry, Leah. We're old friends, so I won't report you. All set?"

He took a pencil from his leather case and tapped it against his notebook as he ruffled the pages, wondering how to begin. It was hard to think logically when a part of his mind was in such confusion. Had Leah been listening in to all of his phone conversations? If so, it was fortunate that he had long ago devised an emergency code. Was it only idle curiosity that had prompted her or was she acting under orders? Was anyone else watching him, he wondered, listening to his talk, perhaps even checking the routine of his experimental work? There was Lanza this morning—why had he come unannounced, in person, when a Communications call would have served the purpose equally well?

Leah's voice broke in. "I'm ready, Dr. Wong."

He cleared his throat. ". . . the Summer Seminar. Title: The Propogation of White Martian virus. Paragraph. It will be remembered that the early attempts to establish Earth colonies on Mars were frustrated by the extreme susceptibility of our people to two viruses native to the foreign planet, viruses which we

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designate as Blue Martian and White Martian, according to the two distinct types of fever which they cause. Blue Martian Fever in the early days caused a mortality among our colonists of nearly eighty-five per cent, and made the establishment of permanent colonies a virtual impossibility.

"Under the inspired leadership of Leader Marley and with the advice of his deputy Dr. Lanza, this laboratory in Research worked out a method of growing the virus and producing an immunizing agent which is effective in nearly all human beings. Only the cooperation of several Categories made possible such a feat. It will not be forgotten that even the humblest helpers in the Institute had their share in the project, that some of them acted as human volunteers in the experiments, well knowing the risks they ran, and were afterward rewarded by a Free Choice.

"One person in Office Category, for instance, was given the privilege of learning to play the flute, although nobody in his family had ever belonged to Music, and another person in Menial Category was permitted a month's study of elementary algebra, a nearly unheard of indulgence for a person in his position. But as Leader Marley so graciously remarked in conferring the awards: To the individual who risks much, the State gives much."

"Like me and Tanya?" the girl asked, stopping her typing.

"Yes, like you and Tanya. You were allowed to act a part in an amateur Theater group, I remember, and since Tanya was made too ill to be able to use a Free Choice, she was sent out west to the Playground, just as though she had belonged to Ruler Category. Now where was I?"

"'The State gives much.'"

"Oh, yes. Paragraph. Since the discovery of the immunizing mechanism to Blue Martian, permanent colonies have been established on Mars. But there remains the more elusive problem of White Martian Fever, which, though its mortality is only thirty per cent, is still so crippling to those victims who survive that the Martian colonies cannot begin to expand, and the resources of the planet cannot be fully developed, until an immunizing agent is found.

"For the past eight years this laboratory has been working at the problem, among others, and we are now in a position to report a small degree of progress. Since it proved to be impossible to grow the virus in the usual media, it occurred to us—"

The intercom buzzed, and Dr. Wong turned away to open the dial.

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"David? What's happened to you? I've been waiting here in the lab a quarter of an hour."

"Sorry, Karl. I thought I had more time. Be right down."

He reached for his white lab coat and shoved his long arms into the starched sleeves. "That's all we have time for now, Leah. Can you get an early lunch and be back here this afternoon at two?"

But she was not listening. She was leaning over to look at the desk, staring avidly at the open pages of Dr. Wong's notebook. Without comment he picked up the book, closed it, put it in the top drawer and locked the drawer. She watched him with curious eyes.

"What funny marks those were, Dr. Wong! Do you keep your notes in a private system of shorthand?"

"No. I write them in Coptic. For the sake of privacy."

"What's Coptic?"

"A dead language, spoken by the ancient Egyptians thirty or forty centuries ago."

"But you're Research, not Linguistics! It's against the law for you to know other languages. Are you a traitor?"

"My dear Leah," he said, "I'm far too sensible a man to go in for bootleg study, to learn anything without permission. I have no wish to end up with a pick-ax in my hands. But you shouldn't tax your little mind with thinking. It's not your job. You're not equipped for it, and it's dangerous."

DAVID passed the watchguard stationed in the basement corridor, walked through the open door of the laboratory, past the bench where a row of pretty technicians sat making serial dilutions of bacterial and virus suspensions, through the glow of the sterilizing room, and on into the small inner lab where flasks of culture media and developing hens' eggs sat in a transparent incubator, and petri dishes flecked with spots of color awaited his inspection.

Dr. Karl Haslam was standing at the work bench, with a pair of silver forceps which held a small egg under the psi light. Gently he lowered the egg into its warm observation chamber, covered the container, and sat down.

"Well, here I am. What's gone wrong? Explain yourself, my boy."

"Just a minute." Grinning maliciously, David took down a bottle from the shelf of chemicals, poured a colorless liquid into a beaker, and walked casually toward the doorway as he agitated the mixture of hydrogen sulphide and mercaptans. He held his

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breath, then coughed, when the fumes of putrescence filled the room and drifted out the door. He looked into the technician's room.

"Sorry for the aroma, girls, but this is a vital experiment."

"Can't you at least shut the door?" one called pleadingly.

"Explain to the watchguard out there, will you?" Closing the door, he turned on the ventilator and sat down beside Dr. Haslam.

"Why all the melodrama?" Karl asked, baffled. "First you call me by emergency code, then you hole in like a conspirator. I'm beginning to think you're a great loss to Theater. What's happened? Why is it later than I think?"

"Do you take everything as a joke, Karl?"

"Certainly, until I'm forced to do otherwise. What's worrying you?"

"I'm afraid of being arrested for treason. Don't laugh! This morning I received a message, delivered in person by our old schoolmate Lanza, to report to Leader Marley on Wednesday, and Marley hasn't paid any attention to me since he last inspected our lab, years ago. For another thing, Leah Hachovnik is making a nuisance of herself with her curiosity about my affairs. If she weren't so clumsy about her prying, I'd almost believe she was under orders to spy on me."

Karl moved impatiently. "I hope you're not turning psychotic. You have a clean record of continuous production and you've never mixed in politics. You've never expressed what you may really think of our Leader even to me, although we've been friends since we were in Medschool, and I hope you never will. And you're making progress with White Martian. Why, my boy, you're all set! What's treasonable about that?"

Someone knocked at the door. Hastily David uncovered the fragrant beaker and waved it about as he called, "Come in!"

The watchguard looked in for an instant, wrinkled his nose, and quickly shut the door. Laughing, David covered the beaker, and began walking about with long nervous strides, snapping his fingers as he tried to explain.

"I'm in trouble, Karl. I've run into something I don't know how to deal with, and I need help, I need advice, I need cooperation. I've lived alone with this thing for ten long years, hoping month after month that something would turn up so I could evade the issue. But nothing has. And now there's going to be a showdown."

Karl touched his arm sympathetically. "My dear boy—"

"*That's it!*" shouted David.

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"What's what?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. Why do you always call me your 'dear boy?' You know I'm a year older than you are."

"It's just habit, I suppose. You *look* so young — your hair is black, while mine is nearly white. You're full of vigor, while I begin to creak with middle age. I didn't realize that I irritated you with my little phrase. I should think you'd be pleased that you have somehow managed to sip at the fountain of youth."

David sank down on a stool. "I'm not pleased. I'm terrified."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that's exactly what's happened. I have sipped at the fountain of youth. I've discovered how to keep people from growing old. I myself have not aged a bit in the last ten years."

There was a long silence. Karl sat unmoving, his face like stone.

"I don't believe you," he said at last.

"It's no longer a question of belief. In a few days everybody will know, the proof will stare you in the face. And what will happen then?"

"Evidence?" Karl asked. "I can't accept a statement as a fact."

"Would you like to see my mice? Come with me."

David Wong hurried into the small animal room and paused before a stack of wire cages in which furry creatures darted and squeaked.

"You remember when we were working on Blue Martian, those peculiar mutants we found in our mice, and how I used six of them in trying to make antibodies to the virus?"

"I remember," said Karl. "They were spotted with tufts of white hair on the right forelegs."

David took down a cage, thrust in his hand, and brought out two of the tiny black mice which crawled over his trembling hand. Their right forelegs bore tufts of long white hair.

"These," he said, "are the same mice."

"Their descendants, you mean. Mice don't live that long."

"*These* mice do. And they'll go on living. For years I've lived in fear that someone would notice and suspect the truth. Just as for years, every time someone has laughed and told me I never seemed to age a day, I've been terrified that he might guess the truth. I'm *not* aging."

Karl looked dazed. "Well, my boy, you've got a bear by the tail. How did you find the elixir or whatever it is?"

"You remember the early work with radioactive tracers, a couple of hundred years ago, that proved that all our body cells are in a

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continuous state of flux? There's a dynamic equilibrium between the disintegration and the resynthesis of the essential factors such as proteins, fats and amino groups, but the cell directs all the incoming material into the right chemical structures, under the influence of some organizing power which resides in the cell.

"Foreign influences like viruses may disrupt this order and cause cancer. The cells are continually in a state of change, but always replace their characteristic molecules, and it is only as they grow older that they gradually become 'worn out.' Then the body grows old, becomes less resistant to infection, and eventually succumbs to one disease or another. And you know, of course, that viruses also have this self-duplicating ability.

"I reasoned that at birth a man had a definite, finite amount of this essential self-duplicating entity—SDE—in his body cells, a kind of directing factor which reproduces itself, but more slowly than do the body cells. In that case, with the normal multiplication of the cells, the amount of SDE per cell would slowly but surely grow smaller with the years. Eventually the time would come when the percentage would be below the critical level—the cells would be less resistant, would function with less efficiency, and the man would 'grow old.'"

Karl nodded soberly. "Reasonable hypothesis."

"But one day, by pure chance, I isolated a component which I recognized as being the factor essential to the normal functioning of body cells. It hit me like a toothache. I found that I could synthesize the SDE in the lab, and the only problem then was to get it into a man's cells. If I could do that, keep the SDE level up to that of youth, a man would stop aging! Since viruses penetrate our cells when they infect us, it was no trick at all to effect a chemical coupling of the SDE to the virus. I used Martian Blue, since it was handy, and its effects are usually brief.

"Presto! Old age is held at bay for another twenty or thirty years —I really don't know how long. These mice were my first experiment, and as you see, they're still alive. Next, I tried it on myself."

David put the mice back in their cage, locked it, and returned to the lab.

"Tomorrow, the whole thing is bound to come out because Tanya Hachovnik is coming back. You know her sister Leah —gray, dried-up, soured on life. Well, I've had ways of checking, and when Tanya Hachovnik walks into the Institute, everyone will see her as the same luscious

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redhead of twenty-five we knew ten years ago. I realize that what I did was a criminal act. I didn't think the thing through or I wouldn't have been such a fool. But when I made those final experiments, I used the Hachovnik twins for a controlled pair."

"You must have been crazy!"

"Perhaps I was. I'd tried it on myself, of course, with no bad effects except a few days' fever, but I realized that without a control I never could be sure the SDE was actually working. It might be just that my particular genetic constitution caused me to age more slowly than the average.

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So I chose the twins. To Leah I gave the attenuated Martian Blue, but to Tanya I gave the simple Blue coupled with SDE. The experiment worked. Identical twins—one grows old like other people; the other remains young. I know now, Karl, how to prolong youth indefinitely. But what in the name of Leader Marley shall I do with my knowledge?"

Karl Haslam absently twisted his white hair and spoke slowly, as though he found trouble in choosing his words.

"You realize, of course, that it is your duty to acquaint Leader Marley with all the details of your discovery?"

"Is it? Can you imagine what this will do to our society? What about the generations of children coming into a world where no places have been vacated for them by death? What about the struggles for power? Who will decide, and on what basis, whether to confer or to withhold this gift? There'll be riots, civil wars. I know that I'm only a scientist; all I ever wanted from life was to be left alone, in a peaceful laboratory, and let other people worry about the world and its troubles. But now—don't you see that by the mere fact that I made this discovery, I've lost the right to sit by quietly and let other people make the decisions?"

"But, David, you and I aren't able to handle such a problem! We're only Research!"

"I know. We're inadequate, yet we have the responsibility. The men who created atomic power probably felt inadequate, too, but could they have made as bad a mess of handling it as others did? Suppose I did turn this over to Marley—he'd use it to become the most absolute tyrant in the history of the race."

Karl ran his fingers through his hair and smiled crookedly. "Well, you could always start a revolution, I suppose, and start by assassinating the Leader."

"With what kind of weapon? Men like you and me are not allowed to own so much as an old-fashioned pistol. Except for the Military, Marley's the only man allowed to wear a Needler. And, besides, I'm a Research, not a Military. I hate violence and I'm naturally conditioned against killing."

"Then you shouldn't have got into this mess. It would have been far better never to have discovered this SDE. I presume your notes are safely locked up, by the way?"

David grinned. "Don't worry about my notes; they're written in Coptic. You remember when I was still in Medschool and made my first important discovery, how to prevent the development of

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hereditary baldness by the injection of certain parahormones? Leader Marley rewarded me with a Free Choice, and I chose to learn a dead language. Not half a dozen men in the world could read my notes."

"If your notes are safe, why don't you just destroy your mice and get rid of your proof that way?"

"And the Hachovnik twins?"

"You could at least keep Tanya out of sight."

"Don't be a fool. That would only be a temporary measure and has nothing to do with the real problem. Lanza and Marley may suspect the truth right now, for all I know; they keep such close watch on my work. Anyway, the secret is bound to come out sooner or later."

Dr. Haslam clasped his hands and stared at them for a long while. His lined face looked grayer than ever.

He looked up at last with a faint smile. "Well, my boy, I never asked you to discover this stuff, but since you have—I hereby burn my bridges! You're right, we can't give it to Marley. But you can't handle it alone. What we need is time, and we haven't got it. We shall both be liquidated before this is over, there's no doubt of that, but we must do what we can. When is Tanya arriving?"

"Tomorrow night, on the Playground Jet."

"And you see Leader Marley when?"

"Next Wednesday."

"Five days yet. Then this is what we'll do. Too bad Lanza is in the other camp, but there's you and me, and I think Hudson and Fauré from Serology will come in with us. We'll need others — sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists—the most promising material from all Categories if we're to create a new society based on the prospect of immortality. But I'll see the first two and bring them to your apartment tomorrow night for Tanya's welcome-home party. I leave it to you to muzzle Leah."

"That won't do," said David. "I don't have a current Free Choice."

"But I have. Two, as a matter of fact, a reward for curing the insomnia of Leader Marley's wife. I choose to give a party, I choose tomorrow night, and I choose your apartment."

A knock rattled the door, and the watchguard thrust in his head. "How much longer is this here experiment going to take? Do you guys want to be reported?"

"Just finishing, Officer," called Karl. "You can leave the door open now."

"What a stink!" said the guard.

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"Thank God I'm in Military!"

IT hardly seemed like a party, David thought. His guests were ill at ease, and their conversation labored, then stopped altogether when the Menial came into the library with a tray of glasses and niblets.

"Put them on the liquor cabinet, James," said David. "And that will be all. Enjoy yourself tonight."

The Menial put down the tray and then stooped to fumble with the lock.

"Let that alone! I've told you a thousand times not to monkey with my liquor cabinet!"

"Don't you want me to get out the ice cubes, Doctor?"

"I'll do it. You can go now."

"But are you sure you won't want me later in the evening, Doctor? Who's to serve the supper? Who's going to clear up afterward?"

"We'll manage. Don't worry about us."

James shuffled out of the room.

"I suppose that means *I'll* manage," said Leah, with a self-pitying sigh. "I've noticed that whenever people decide to rough it and do without a Menial, they take it for granted the women will do the work, never the men —unless the women are still young and pretty. Well, at any rate, I'll have Tanya to help me. I still don't see why you wouldn't let me go to the Port to meet her, Dr. Wong."

"I just thought it would be more of a celebration if we had a surprise party all waiting for her to walk into. Dr. Haslam will bring her here directly from the Port, and here we all are, her old friends from the Institute, waiting to welcome her home."

"I'd hardly say all," said Leah. "I'm the only person from Office that's here. And why have a party in your Library, Dr. Wong? Nothing here but books, books, books."

"Because I keep my liquor here, in the only room I have a right to lock up. My Menial is a good man, but he can't resist an opened bottle."

"Well, it's still a gloomy party."

David turned appealingly to his other guests, Hudson and Fauré, but they only looked uncomfortable.

"Perhaps we need a drink." David unlocked the cupboard and picked up a bottle which he set down hastily when he heard voices in the hall. He hurried to the outer door and opened it a few inches to reveal the sturdy shoulders of the watchguard of the floor and, beyond him, Karl Haslam.

"Everything in order, Officer?" asked Karl.

"Your permit is in order, Dr.

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Haslam. A private party. Let me just check—yes, three guests have arrived, and you two make five. That all? You have until midnight. But it beats me why you people in Research prefer a party without a watchguard, or why Leader Marley ever gives permission. Why, in all my years in Military, I've never been to an unwatched party, and I must say it never held us down any."

Karl laughed a little too forcedly. "I'll bet it didn't! But all Research people are a little peculiar. You must have noticed that yourself."

"Well—"

"And you know how generous Leader Marley is, and how kind he is to loyal citizens. He wants us to be happy, so he pampers us now and then."

"I guess he knows what he's doing, all right. Well, I'll check you out at twelve, then."

"Go on in, Tanya," said Karl.

They stepped into the apartment and David quietly closed the door.

"Hi, Sis," drawled Leah. "You made us wait long enough!" She walked toward the girl, hand outstretched, then stopped with a gasp of disbelief.

Tanya's red hair was still brilliant and gleaming, her creamy skin unlined, and her full red lips curved up into a friendly smile as she leaned forward for a sisterly kiss. But Leah jerked away and glared with anger.

A puzzled frown creased Tanya's lovely white forehead.

"What's the matter, Leah? Aren't you glad to see me? You look so strange, as though you'd been terribly ill!"

Leah shook her head, tears of rage gathering in her pale eyes. "I'm okay," she whispered. "It's you. You haven't changed. I have. You're still young, you're pretty, *you're just the way I used to be!*" She whirled to face David, her voice choking.

"What have you done to her, Dr. Wong?"

The four men in the room were all staring at the sisters, scarcely believing what they saw, although they had all been prepared for the contrast. The twin sisters were no longer twins. One had retained her youth; the other was faded, aging.

"This is awful," Haslam muttered. "Absolutely ghastly." He put a comforting hand on Leah's shoulder, and with a deep sob she hid her face against him and cried.

Hudson and Fauré could not take their eyes from Tanya, and David leaned against the wall to stop his trembling.

"Sit down, all of you," he said. "First we'll have a drink. I'm sure we all need it. Then we'll face—what has to be faced."

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AN hour later, they had achieved a calmness, of sorts. They had given up some of their normal sobriety to achieve the calm, but they were grateful to the drug for cushioning the shock.

David paced the floor, glass in hand, talking rapidly as he finished his long explanation.

"So you see what happened," he said. "When I began the experiment, I had no idea how staggering the results might be. That is, I knew in my mind, but I never imagined the *realness* of what would happen. I thought of it as just an experiment."

Leah sniffed, her resentment somewhat dulled by drink. "So I was just an experiment! Don't you ever think about people's feelings? I know I'm not as good as you are; I'm only Office, but I'm human."

Karl patted her hand. "Of course you are, Leah. But that is one of the defects of people in Research—they forget about human emotions." He looked up sternly at David. "They go ahead with their experiments, and hang the consequences. If Dr. Wong had had any sense, he would never have kept this a secret for ten years, and we might have had ten years to prepare ourselves for such a responsibility. Instead, we have only a few days or, at most, weeks. Hudson! Fauré! How do you feel about this thing now? Are you still game?"

Both men seemed a little dazed, but Fauré pulled himself together, speaking slowly, like a man in a dream.

"We're with you. It's still hard to believe: we've got immortality!"

"I'd hardly call it immortality," said Hudson drily, "since, as I understand it, SDE does not kill disease entities, nor ward off bullets or the disintegrating nuclear shaft of the needler—as we will very likely find out before very long. But what do we do now? When people see these two girls together, it won't be an hour before Marley hears about it."

David spoke up with a new authority. "He must not hear about it. I know how poorly equipped I am to handle this situation, but since I created it, I must assume responsibility, and I have made my plans.

"First, you, Tanya. Try to realize that if the Leader finds out that I have this secret of keeping youth, he will want it for himself. Nobody in Menial, nobody in Office, nobody in Research—almost nobody at all—will be allowed to benefit from it. Marley will use it as a special reward for certain Rulers, and he will try to keep its very existence a secret so that people in general will not be envious or rebellious. That means that he will have to

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get rid of you."

"Get rid of me? But I haven't done any harm!"

"Just by existing and letting people look at your unchanging youth, you will be a threat to him, for you will give away his secret. How he'll deal with you, I don't know. Concentration camp, exile, or more probably, simple execution on grounds of treason, such as unauthorized choices of activity or study. It doesn't matter, he'll find a way. The only safety for you is in keeping hidden. You must stay quietly in Leah's apartment until we can find a refuge for you. Do you see that?"

She looked around in bewilderment. "Is that right, Dr. Haslam? And what will they think at the Institute? I'm supposed to go back to my job in Intercom."

"Dr. Wong is right," he said kindly. "Please believe us. It's hard for you to understand that we are asking you to do something secret, but just try to remember that you are, after all, an Office Category and are not equipped by training or constitution to think out problems like this. We'll tell you what is the right thing to do. You just do as we tell you, and you'll be perfectly safe."

Leah snickered. "Oh, *she'll* be safe enough, being as pretty as she is! What are you going to do about me? Don't I count?"

"We'll come to that in a few minutes. Right now, we need food. Leah, you and Tanya be good girls and go out to the kitchen and heat up some supper for us. After we've eaten, we'll talk about you."

AS soon as the girls were out of the room, the four men drew together at the table.

"No use burdening them with too much knowledge," Karl remarked. "Even as it is, they are a great danger to us, and the less they know the better. David, will you proceed?"

"I have little to add to the plans we made last night at the lab. The thing we need most is time; and next to that, a hiding place. We may very soon be classed as traitors, with every watchguard on the continent hunting for us. We will take care that they don't find us. Now, you said last night that each one of you has accumulated a Free Choice during the past year, which hasn't yet been used."

"That's right," said Fauré. "I intended to use mine next winter to live among the Australian aborigines for a week. I've been wanting that for years, but the planners always refused me; it was a project without practical purpose."

"And I intended to use mine

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to attempt a water-color painting," added Hudson. "In my boyhood I hoped to be put in Arts Category, but the Planners laughed at me. I suppose it's wrong, yet I still have the yen."

"You have my sympathy," said Karl. "I was going to take an Aimless Tramp. Just shed my identity and wander on foot through the great north area of woods and lakes."

David sighed. "Well, if we are successful in hiding and in changing the world as we'd like, you can all three be free to do as you like without asking permission. But at present that's only the wildest of dreams. And, first, we must find our refuge. Today is Saturday. Tomorrow morning, each of you will go to BureauMed and claim your Free Choice. And each of you will choose an Aimless Tramp."

"But I don't like hiking," objected Hudson.

"You won't be hiking. You'll take off in your roboplanes and then disappear. You will be without supervision. You will then proceed, disguised as you think suitable, to find a place for our new colony—somewhere in South America?—and make preliminary arrangements to receive us. You must be back by Tuesday afternoon at the latest. On Tuesday, as soon as you have reported back to BureauMed, get to the Institute as fast as you can."

"Why the deadline?"

"Because by Tuesday afternoon, sometime before evening, probably, I expect all three of you to be suffering from an attack of Blue Martian Fever, and I want you to get expert hospital care. You will be the nucleus of the new regime."

Karl laughed. "I wish you could have picked a base for your SDE that was less unpleasant than Blue Martian."

"Who's got Blue Martian?" asked Tanya, as the girls came in from the kitchen with their trays of food. "I'll never forget how sick it made me."

"You should worry," said Leah. "It kept you young and beautiful, didn't it?"

"You won't have to envy her, Leah," said David going to the liquor cabinet. "I'm going to give you and the others a shot of the SDE-Martian Blue. Sometime Tuesday afternoon you should feel the first symptoms. But after forty-eight hours in the hospital, you'll be good as new. And you will all stop growing older."

They watched, fascinated, as he opened the cooling compartment of the liquor cupboard.

"I always like plenty of ice in my drinks," he remarked, drawing out a tray of cubes and opening a small door behind the tray. He removed several small bottles

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filled with a milky liquid, and a copper box of sterile needles and syringes.

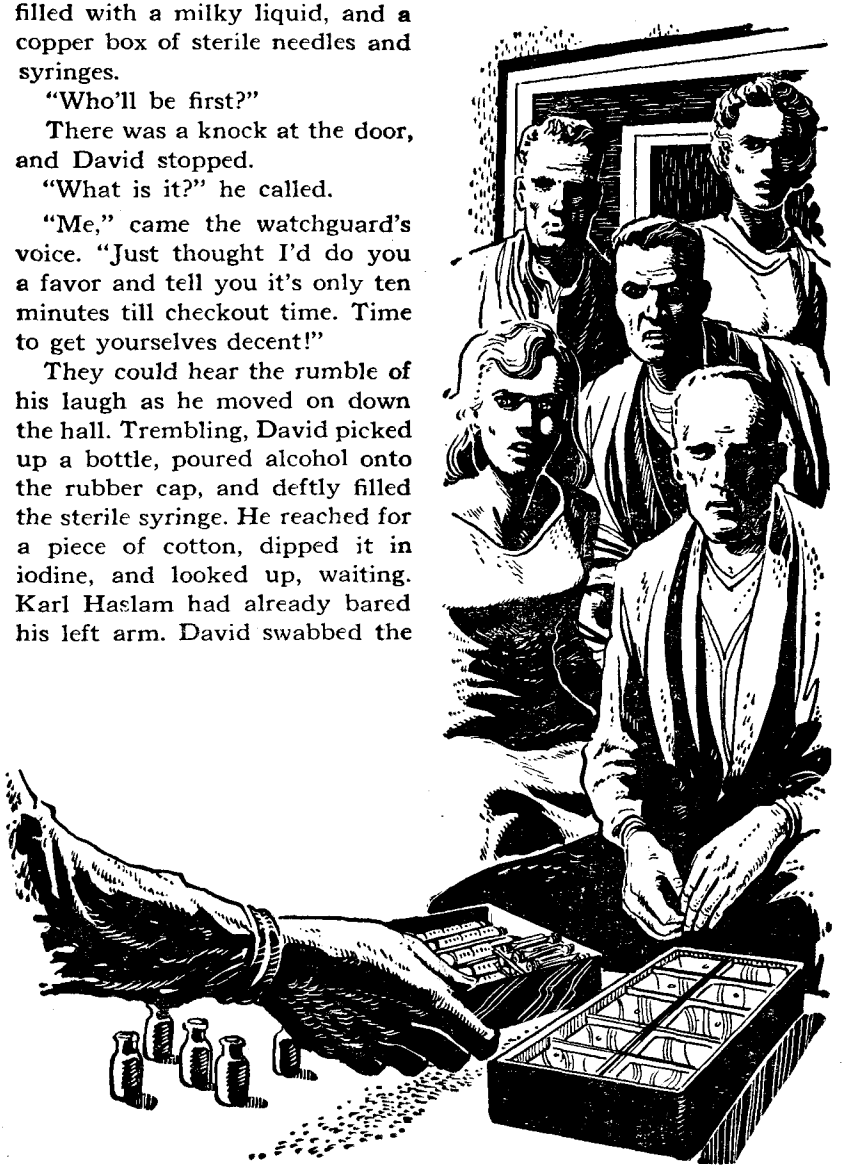
"Who'll be first?"

There was a knock at the door, and David stopped.

"What is it?" he called.

"Me," came the watchguard's voice. "Just thought I'd do you a favor and tell you it's only ten minutes till checkout time. Time to get yourselves decent!"

They could hear the rumble of his laugh as he moved on down the hall. Trembling, David picked up a bottle, poured alcohol onto the rubber cap, and deftly filled the sterile syringe. He reached for a piece of cotton, dipped it in iodine, and looked up, waiting. Karl Haslam had already bared his left arm. David swabbed the



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spot on the upper deltoid.

Karl laughed. "Here I come, Methuselah!"

"All set?" asked David.

He plunged the needle home.

DAVID ran up the steps of the Institute, two at a time, and hurried toward his office through the echoing corridors, where the usual watchguard sauntered on patrol.

"Morning, Jones."

"Good morning, Doctor. Pretty early, aren't you?"

"Wednesday's my busy day." He settled at his desk, miserably conscious of the open door and curious eyes behind him, opened his briefcase, then glanced at his wristwatch. More than an hour before his interview with Leader Marley.

Spreading some data sheets before him, he looked at them blankly as he tried to order his thoughts. His eyes were ringed with dark depressions, for he had had no sleep. There had been so many things to plan for, so many arrangements to make.

It was possible, of course, that this morning's talk would turn out to be mere routine. There might remain several weeks of freedom—but there might be only a few hours. He shrank from the complexity of the problem before him; he was a Research man, devoted to his test tubes and his culture growths, and would have been happy never to face any problem beyond them.

He had a moment's revulsion at the unfairness of the fact that a simple experiment in the lab, an addition to man's knowledge of the Universe, should have plunged him against his will into a situation far beyond his ability to handle. There had been, as Karl pointed out, the alternative of turning the SDE over to the Leader. That would have absolved him of all responsibility. But that was the trouble, he thought. Responsibility could not be confined to squiggles in his notebook, when those squiggles might affect the whole of society.

"Dr. Wong!"

He jumped and turned around hastily.

"Leah! What in the world?"

She stood in the doorway, glaring at him, breathing heavily as though she were trying to hold back sobs. Slowly she tottered to the desk and sank down into her chair by the stenograph.

"You doublecrosser!" she whispered.

He looked quickly at the doorway, but the guard had not come back. Leaning forward, he questioned her fiercely.

"What are you doing here? They told me yesterday that several people had come down with attacks of Blue Martian. Why

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aren't you in the hospital with the others?"

"Because I wasn't sick!"

"But I gave you—"

"Imagine how I felt," she raced on, "watching Dr. Haslam start having a chill, hearing Dr. Fauré complain about his awful headache, and listening to Dr. Hudson dial Intercom and call for a doctor. And all that time I was waiting, waiting for something to happen to me. And nothing did! What have you got against me, Dr. Wong, that you infect all the others and only pretend to do it to me? I don't want to grow old any more than they do!"

"But I wasn't pretending. Quiet, now, and let me think."

He waited until the watchguard had passed by the door, then raised his head.

"Look here, Leah. Evidently the infection didn't take. This is what must have happened. That treatment I gave you ten years ago must have made you permanently immune to Blue Martian, and the antibodies it formed in your cells simply protected you against this new invasion of the virus. It never occurred to me that the immunity would last so long. But don't worry, I'll find a way."

She looked suspicious. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that there's no reason why Blue Martian should be the only vehicle for giving you the SDE. There must be other viruses that will work equally well. It's only a question of finding one."

"And how long will that take you?"

"How long does anything take in Research? Maybe a week, maybe a year."

"And maybe ten! I can't wait, Dr. Wong. I'm thirty-five now; I'm growing older. What good will a long life do me, if it only preserves me as the middle-aged woman I'll be by then? And all those years that I'll be getting older and older, there'll be Tanya, lively and pretty, to remind me that I was once like that, too. I can't face it!"

"The watchguard will hear you!" Haggard-faced, he watched her shaking shoulders, hearing her muffled sobs.

"You're a criminal, Dr. Wong! It was a crime, what you did to Tanya and me."

"I didn't realize in the beginning or I'd never have touched the thing. I know it now, even better than you do, but what can I do?"

She looked up and wiped her eyes, her mouth set hard. "I know what I can do. I can report you to the Leader."

"What good will that do? You know how terrible you feel now about being left out—though I swear I never meant it to be like

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this. But just try to imagine. If you report me so that Leader Marley gets the secret of SDE, then thousands of people will be put in just the same situation you are in. You're only one person suffering. But then there'd be hundreds of thousands, millions! Surely you wouldn't want to have that on your conscience?"

"Do you think I'd care?"

"You would when you felt calmer. You're wrought up, ill. Let me send you home. Promise me you'll go home quietly, talk it over with Tanya, and not say anything to anyone else. I'll think of a way out for you. Just be patient."

"Patient!"

He thought of calling Karl Haslam. Karl would know best how to deal with her, how to bring her back to reason. He reached toward the intercom, then dropped his hand in despair. Karl was in the hospital, with Faurée and Hudson, shivering with the cold of Blue Martian fever. But he had to get her away.

He pressed the intercom dial. "Dr. Wong speaking. Miss Hachovnik is ill and is being sent home. Please send an aircab for her at once."

He helped Leah to her feet, and spoke pleadingly.

"Promise you'll be good, Leah?"

The fury in her eyes nearly knocked him down. Without a word, without a gesture, she walked out.

DAVID felt as though he'd been put through a wringer as he followed Officer Magnun into the Leader's suite at State House. Several nights of sleeplessness, the worries of planning for a refuge, and the scene with Leah had left him limp and spiritless. The girl was a danger, he knew, but she was only one of many.

He nodded at Dr. Lanza, who was busy reading reports from BureauMed, and saluted Leader Marley, who was talking with a watchguard.

Marley looked up briefly. "Sit down, Wong."

David folded himself into a chair, grateful for a few moments in which to collect himself, while Marley gave the last of his orders.

"Put them in the Vermont granite quarries, and keep them at work for the next year."

"As you say, Leader. With the usual secrecy, of course?"

"No, you blockhead! These are a bunch of nobodies. Use all the publicity you can get. Keep a punishment a secret and how can it have any effect on other people? No, I want full radio and news coverage and telecast showings as they swing the first pick at the first rocks. People have

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got to realize that the Leader knows best, that treason doesn't pay. No matter how clever they think they are, they'll always get caught. Understand?"

"As you say, Leader."

"Then get going." As the guard left the room, Leader Marley turned to David. "What fools people are!"

He ran his beefy hands through a shock of black hair, blinked his eyes, and wrinkled the heavy black brows that met over his nose. Wonderingly, he shook his massive head as he drew his gleaming needler from his breast pocket and played with it, tossing it from hand to hand while he talked.

"I'm probably the most generous Leader the State has had since the Atomic Wars, Wong, and I never withhold a privilege from someone who has deserved it. But people mistake me when they think that I am weak and will overlook treason."

"Your generosity is a byword, Leader Marley," said Wong. "But some people are incapable of acting for their best interests even when you have defined it for them. Who are these latest traitors?"

"Oh, nobody really important, of course, except as they waste time which they owe to the State. Just attempts at illegal study. An Office Category who had found a basement room in a deserted building and was spending all his evening hours there practicing the violin. A Theater man who was illegally trying to learn carpentry. And a teacher of mathematics who had forged a key to the Linguistics library, and had been getting in every night to study a dead language—Cuneiform, Latin, something like that, utterly without practical value. This last one is an old man, too, and ought to have known better. People must be made to realize that if they want the privilege of useless study, they will have to earn it. And I am very broad-minded in such cases."

"Nobody has better reason to know that than I, Leader Marley, and I am always grateful to you."

Marley coughed and straightened the jacket over his bearlike chest as he put back his needler.

"Now to business. Where's that memorandum, Lanza?"

Dr. Lanza handed him the paper, then sat down beside the Leader.

"First. When Dr. Lanza called on you last week, he found the door to your office locked. What explanation do you have?"

David smiled and spread his hands. "My explanation is the generosity of Leader Marley. You have so many affairs to occupy your attention that it is not surprising that you do not remember

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rewarding me with a Free Choice some years ago, for my work on Martian Blue. I chose, as I am sure you remember now, an occasional hour of Privacy."

The Leader blinked. "That's right. I had forgotten. Well, the Leader never goes back on his word. Though why in the name of Marley you fellows want a crazy thing like that is beyond me. What do you *do,* behind a locked door, that you don't want anyone to see?"

"Do you doubt my loyalty, Leader Marley?"

"I doubt everything. What do you *want* with Privacy?"

Lanza broke in amiably. "I'm afraid we just have to accept such wishes as one of the harmless abnormalities of the Research mind, Leader. Since I grew up in that Category, I understand it to some extent."

"You're right in calling it abnormal. I think perhaps I'd better remove that from the possible Choices in the future. It could easily be misused, and it never did make any sense to me.

"Well, second. It's been more than three years since you reported any progress with the problem of White Martian Fever, Wong. What is your explanation?"

"Research is not always swift, Leader."

"But I distinctly ordered you to find an immunizing agent within three years. Our colonies on Mars cannot wait forever. I've been patient with you, but you've had more than enough time."

"I am very sorry, Leader Marley. I have done my best and so have my colleagues. But the problem is complex. If I may explain, we had to find a suitable culture medium for growing the virus, and then we had to work at the problem of coupling it with suitable haptens—"

Impatiently, Marley waved his hand. "You know I don't understand your jargon. That's not my business, what troubles you've had. I want results. You got results on Blue Martian quickly enough."

"We were fortunate. But when we storm the citadel of knowledge, Leader Marley, no one can predict how long it will take for the citadel to fall."

"Nonsense! I'm warning you, Wong, you're failing in your duty to the State, and you can't escape the consequences with poetic doubletalk. I allow special privileges to you people in Research and I expect a proper appreciation in return. When I order you to produce a protection for White Martian, I want results!"

"But you can't get a thing like that just by asking for it. Such things are simply not under your control."

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"Watch yourself, Wong! Your remarks are dangerously close to treason!"

"Is it treason to tell you a plain fact?"

Stony-faced, David stared defiantly at Marley, trying to control the trembling of his body. If he had had a needler at that instant, he realized incredulously, he would have shot the Leader and thought his own life a small price to pay for such a pleasure.

Lanza coughed. "I'm afraid Dr. Wong is not well, Leader. Worrying over the slowness of his work has distorted his reactions. But I am sure that you will understand, as you always do, and be indulgent."

"I'll overlook your remarks, Wong," said Marley, relaxing. "But you'd better change your attitude. You Research people cause me more trouble than any other three Categories put together. Sometimes I wonder if a spell in the granite quarries mightn't—"

A light flashed on his desk. He watched the blinking code for a second, then rose abruptly and left the room.

The two men sat in silence. David glanced at Lanza, and Lanza shifted in his chair.

"Thanks for the good word," said David wearily. "How do you like being a Ruler, by the way? When we were at Medschool together, I thought you were a man with ideas."

"When I was at Medschool I didn't know what was good for me," Lanza replied stiffly.

"And you think you do now?"

A slow flush crept over Lanza's face. "Look here, Wong! Each man has to make his own terms with himself. Don't act so smug! You shut yourself away inside the nice white walls of your laboratory and ignore all the conflicts of life. You shut your ears and your eyes, live in perfect harmony with your test tubes, and let the world go hang. Well, that isn't my way."

"Your way, apparently, is to worm yourself into the confidence of that steel-hearted imbecile who rules our lives and our thoughts, and spend twenty-four hours a day saying, 'Yes, Yes,' and waiting for him to die so you can step into his shoes!"

"We're alone," said Lanza. "I won't report you. But I have no intention of justifying myself. Have you any idea why you've been let alone for so long? You haven't produced anything tangible in several years. Haven't you ever wondered why no one put on the pressure? Haven't—"

He broke off as Marley lumbered back into the room and fell into a chair. The Leader's manner had altered. He stared at David with grim inquiry, the

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beady eyes traveling slowly over him, taking in his rumpled hair, his strained face, the rigid set of his shoulders.

At last Marley spoke, his voice soft with menace.

"You're looking well, Dr. Wong. Remarkably well. In fact, it occurs to me that you don't seem to have aged a bit since my last visit to your laboratory. Tell me, how do you keep your youth?"

DAVID could feel the rush of blood through his body, feel the thud of his racing heart. He kept his voice low so that it would not tremble.

"Thank you, Leader Marley, for your kindness in noticing my appearance. I suppose I chose my parents well. They both lived to be over ninety, you know."

"This is no joking matter. I've just had a report. An epidemic of Blue Martian fever has broken out among the people of your Institute. Why have you not mentioned it?"

"If you will forgive me, Leader Marley, I've had no chance. I reported it in the usual manner to the health authorities, and have here in my briefcase a memorandum which I hoped to bring to your attention, among several other matters, when you had finished giving your instructions to me."

Marley continued implacably, "And how did this epidemic begin? It was my understanding that no insect existed here on Earth that could transmit the virus. Yet several people from your lab came down with the disease on the same day. What is your explanation?"

"It's very simple. To prepare the vaccine, as I am sure you will remember from your last visit to us, we have to keep in the lab a limited number of the *Fafli*, the Martian insects which act as hosts at one stage of the virus's life. Last week a Menial carelessly knocked over one of the cages and several *Fafli* escaped. The Menial was discharged, of course, and put in Punishment, but the damage had already been done."

"You have a very ready explanation."

"Would you rather I had none at all, Leader Marley?"

"Well, let that go." Marley drummed his plump fingers on the desk as he continued. "There was another report for me just now. A report so wild, so incredible, so staggering that I can scarcely bring myself to take it seriously. From an Office Category at the Institute."

David's heart beat wildly, but he forced a smile to his lips. "Oh, yes. You must mean Miss Hachovnik. I've been worried about

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that poor girl for some time."

"What do you mean, 'poor girl'?"

"It's very distressing to me, because she has been a good and loyal worker for many years. But she is becoming unstable. She has a tendency to burst into tears over nothing, is sometimes hysterical, seems to have secret grievances, and is extremely jealous of all women whom she considers more attractive. She was never too bright, to be sure, but until recently she has done her work well, so I've hated to take any action. Just this morning I had to send her home because she was ill."

"Do you mean to say," asked Marley, "that none of her story is true?"

"I don't know. What is her story?"

"She reports that you have been working on a private project of your own, instead of on White Martian. That you have discovered a way to make people immortal, by infecting them with Blue Martian. What is your explanation?"

David only stared, his mind so blurred with panic that he could not speak. His stunned silence was broken by a laugh. It was Dr. Lanza, leaning backward in his chair, holding himself over the stomach as he shook his head.

"These hysterical women!" His laughter trailed off to a commiserating chuckle. "You're too forbearing, Wong. You shouldn't keep a worker who's so far gone. Take a leaf from Leader Marley's book and remember: Kindness is often weakness; when it is necessary for the good of the State, be harsh!"

"I hardly know what to say," said David. "I had no idea she'd gone so far."

"Then there's no truth in it?" Marley persisted. "What she says is impossible?"

"Well," said David judiciously, "we people in Research have learned not to call anything *impossible,* but this dream of immortality is as old as the human race. We have a thousand legends about it, including the story of the Phoenix, that fabulous bird which, when consumed by fire, rose triumphant from its own ashes to begin life anew. A pretty story, of course. But I need only put it to a mind as logical as yours, Leader Marley. Throughout all the millenia of man's existence, the Sun has always risen each morning in the east, and thus we know that it always will. That is the order of nature. Likewise, from the earliest generations of man, no individual has ever lived longer than a hundred and some years, and thus we know that he never will. That is the order of Nature and we can't alter

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it to the best of my knowledge."

Leader Marley was thoughtful. He touched the intercom.

"Send in Officer Magnun."

David held his breath.

"Magnun, Office Category Hachovnik is to be taken from her home at once and put in indefinite Psycho-detention."

Marley stood up. "Very well, Dr. Wong. You may go. But I shall suspend your privilege of Privacy, at least until after you have devised a protection against White Martian. It is not wise to disregard the wishes of the Leader. Lanza, show him out."

At the street door, they paused. Lanza looked at David speculatively.

"You *do* keep your youth well, David."

"Some people do."

"I remember that legend of the Phoenix. What do you suppose the Phoenix did with his new life, once he'd risen from the ashes of his old self?"

"I'm no philosopher."

"Neither am I. But you and I both know that the principle of induction was exploded centuries ago. It's true that the Sun *has* always risen in the east. But is there anything to keep it, someday, from rising in the west?"

THAT night David sat late at his desk. Through the open door behind him, he could hear the watchguard slowly pacing the dimly lit corridor. He could feel time pressing at his back. He was reprieved, he knew, but for how long?

He got up, at one point, when the corridor behind him was quiet, and went to the bookcase. He pressed the brass handle, saw the shelves silently swing away from the wall, then set it back again. The mechanism, installed a century ago by a cautious politician, was still in good order.

Back at his desk, he thought of Leah and her lost youth, lost because of his own impersonal attitude. He felt sorry for her, but there was nothing he could do for her now. It was a relief to know that Tanya, at least, remained hidden and secure in her sister's apartment.

It was after midnight before he closed his notebook and locked it away in the top drawer. His plans were completed. There would not be time given him, he knew, to finish his work on White Martian. That would have to be dropped, and resumed at some more favorable time in the future —if there was a future for him. But he would begin at once to produce in quantity a supply of the SDE-Blue Martian, for he was sure that the untrained guards who watched his movements would never realize that he had shifted to another project.

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With a brief good night to the guard, he left the building to walk home. His shoulders were straight, his stride confident, and he disdained looking behind him to see if anyone was following. He had made his terms with himself, and only death, which he would certainly try to prevent, could alter his plans.

Going into his apartment he wearily turned on the light. Then he froze, feeling as though he had been clubbed. Leah Hachovnik was huddled at one end of the sofa, her face dripping tears.

"I thought you'd never come," she whispered.

He slumped down beside her. "How did you get here, Leah? I thought you were—"

"I hid in your hallway until the watchguard was at the other end. When his back was turned, I just took off my shoes and slipped in. I've been waiting for hours." Her voice was almost inaudible, spent beyond emotion.

"They got Tanya," she said dully. "They took her away."

"What happened? Quick!"

"After I reported to Bureau-Med—I'm sorry I did that, Dr. Wong, but I just couldn't help myself. I didn't tell them about Tanya and the others, just about you. Then I walked around for hours, hating you, hating Tanya, hating everybody. Finally I got so tired that I went home. Just as I got into the hall, I heard a loud knock and I saw Officer Magnun at my door. When Tanya opened it, he simply said, 'Office Category Hachovnik?' When she nodded her head, he said, 'You're under detention.' She screamed and she fought, but he took her away. Since then, I've been hiding. I'm afraid."

David tried to think. He remembered that he had said only "Miss Hachovnik" in his talk with the Leader. Had Marley never known that there was more than one? But Lanza surely knew. Or had he merely assumed that Magnun would ask for Leah? Would they realize, at Psycho-detention, that they had the wrong woman? Probably not, for she would be hysterical with terror, and her very youth and beauty taken in connection with the "jealousy and envy of younger women" which was noted in her commitment order, would seem to confirm her madness. He was still safe, for a while—if he could keep Leah away from the Institute.

"I'm afraid," she whimpered. "Don't let them put me away."

"Then you'll have to do exactly as I tell you. Can you follow orders exactly?"

"Yes, yes!"

"I'll have to hide you here. We can fix up my library as a room for you. It's the only room I can

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keep locked, and which my Menial never enters in my absence. Whatever happens, Leah — no matter what happens — keep yourself hidden. More than your life depends on that."

WHEN the three convalescents returned from the hospital, pale and shaky, David summoned them to his office. At the door, Watchguard Jones looked them over.

"Say, that Blue Martian fever sure does take it out of you. You fellows look like you've been plenty sick!"

"They have been," said David. "Let them by so they can sit down and rest."

Jones moved aside, but he lounged in the doorway, listening.

David ignored him. "Glad to see you back, gentlemen. I'll make this brief. You have been the victims of a laboratory accident just as much as if you'd been contaminated with radiation. Our Leader Marley, who understands the problems of all Categories, has very generously consented to grant you a two weeks' convalescence, in addition to a Free Choice. Take a few minutes to think over your decision."

He strolled over to the window and looked out at the green of the trees just bursting into leaf. Then, as if on impulse, he turned back.

"While you're thinking it over, will you look at these protocols? We discussed them before you got sick, you remember—a plan to prevent an epidemic of Blue Martian. Do you approve of the final form? I'd like to carry on, and after all," he added with an ironic smile, "it's getting later than we might think."

He handed each man a sheet of paper whose contents were identical. They studied them. Karl Haslam was the first to speak.

"You think, then, that other cases of Blue Martian may develop?"

"It is certainly probable. Those *Fafli* insects were never caught."

Karl looked back at his paper. It contained a list of names, some of which were well known to all the country, some of them obscure. Thoughtfully, he nodded as he ran down the list.

Hudson glanced up, frowning, his finger pointed at one name.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "that this particular experiment would prove useful. Surely the Lanza method has not proved to be as effective as we once hoped."

"You may be right. But there's the bare possibility that the *modified* Lanza method might be of enormous benefit to us."

"It is uncertain. Too much of

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a risk. Tat's my opinion."

"Then I'll reconsider. The rest has your approval? Very well. And now what choice have you made for your holiday?"

"I think we are all agreed," said Karl soberly. "We'll have an Aimless Tramp."

"An excellent idea," approved David. "Oh, Jones, will you get an aircab to take the doctors to BureauMed, and then arrange for their Roboplanes to be serviced and ready in an hour?"

"I don't know as I ought to leave my post," said Jones.

"You'd rather stay with us and perhaps be exposed to the Fever?"

"Okay, okay!"

When his footsteps had died away, David leaned forward.

"We've done our best. Another month or so and we should be completely ready for our retirement act."

"If we have a month," said Fauré.

David grinned. "Well, if our time runs out, at least we'll go down fighting. You know all your lines, your props are ready, the plot is worked out, and we can slip into our makeup in an instant — provided the audience shows up."

"You're getting to be quite a joker, David," said Karl. "What if the audience comes around to the stage door?"

"Then we'll try to receive him properly. Our Leader is a man of iron, but I doubt that he's immortal."

They heard the approaching guard.

"I'm sure you'll benefit from your holiday," David went on. "That last checkup showed an antibody titer entirely too high for safety."

"In other words, it's time for us to get going?" asked Karl, smiling.

"That's right. Only the next time the antibody curve rises, it will be for keeps."

FOUR days later it was reported that Judge Brinton, the well-known champion of Category rights, was ill with Blue Martian fever. Three little-known nuclear physicists living in the same apartment in Oak Ridge developed symptoms on the same day. Sporadic cases of Blue Martian flared up all over the continent. Occasionally a whole family was affected—husband, wife, and all the children. There was a mild epidemic at MIT, a more serious one at the School of Social Structure, and at Harvard Medical School nearly a third of the senior class, and they the most brilliant, were hospitalized at the same time.

Rumors blanketed the country like a fog, and people everywhere became uneasy. There were no

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deaths from the illness, but the very idea that an infectious disease could flare up unpredictably all over the nation, out of control, was frightening. It was said that the disease had been beamed to Earth by alien enemies from space; that all its victims became sterile; or that their minds were permanently damaged.

It was also said, though people laughed even as they repeated the rumor, that if you once had Blue Martian Fever you'd become immortal. This particular theory had been clearly traced to the ravings of a red-haired madwoman who was confined to Psychodetention, but still it was too ridiculous not to repeat. For a week, comedians rang a hundred changes on the basic joke:

Wife: Drop dead!

Husband: I can't. I've had Blue Martian.

The unrest became so great that Leader Marley himself appeared on the telecaster to reassure the nation.

He was an impressive figure on the lighted screen, resting solid and at ease in a leather chair, raising his massive black head, lifting his big hand to gesture as his rich voice rolled out.

"You have nothing to fear," he said. "Under your beneficent Leaders, infectious disease has been wiped out many years ago. BureauMed informs me that these scattered cases of Blue Martian fever have been caused by the escape of a few *Falli* insects, which have, since then, been isolated and destroyed. The illness has no serious after-effects. And as for the rumors that it confers immortality—"

He allowed his face to break into a pitying smile as he slowly shook his head, looking regretful and yet somehow amused.

"Those who continue to spread gossip about the fever will only reveal themselves as either psychotics or traitors. Whichever they are, they will be isolated for the good of our society."

The effect of his words was somewhat diminished by the brief glimpse people had of Dr. Lanza, who reached a hand to help the Leader rise. For Dr. Lanza wore an anxious frown, and his face was thin with worry.

In spite of numerous arrests, the rumors continued. For two weeks sporadic outbreaks of the fever occurred, and then, abruptly, they ceased.

IT was more than a week after the last case had been reported that David sat in his basement laboratory beside the opened mouse cage, watching with wry affection as the furry creatures crawled over his hand. These were historic mice, he reflected, whose reactions to SDE had

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opened up a new world, a world which he must somehow help to make better than the present one.

His three colleagues had returned a few days ago from their holiday. They had calmly come back to work, and apparently nobody had thought to put two and two together, and thus connect the epidemic with the vacationers. It had been unfortunate that Tanya should have been put under arrest; it was difficult trying to find amusement for Leah so that she would keep out of sight, but still, on the whole, their luck had been good.

But it was time for David to go back to work in his office. Gently he detached the mice from his hand, dropped them into their cage, and closed the wire trap. He took his leather pencil case and the keys to his desk from the pocket of his lab coat and laid them on the desk, below the nail on which his wristwatch hung. Carelessly he dropped his lab coat onto the desk and reached for his jacket, then paused, listening.

The chatter in the technicians' room suddenly died. In the unnatural quiet sounded a steady march of feet.

David turned to meet the probing black eyes of Leader Marley. Just behind him were Dr. Lanza and Officer Magnun.

There was no time to conceal his mice, David realized. Shrugging into his jacket, he strode forward without hesitation, a smile on his face, and stretched out his hand.

"Leader Marley! This is indeed an honor. If you had only notified us of your visit, we should have been prepared."

"Young as ever, I see, Wong."

"Thank you, Leader." There was no banter in Marley's eyes, he noted, but he continued amiably. "It has been some years since you have honored us by a visit in person. I'm afraid a laboratory is not a very exciting place, but I'd be honored to show you anything that may be of interest to you."

A faint contempt curled Marley's mouth as he glanced around the room. "Nothing to see that I haven't seen before, is there? A lot of test tubes, a bunch of flasks, a mess of apparatus you'd think had been dreamed up by an idiot, and a bad smell. You still keep animals, I notice."

He sauntered over to the bench, picked up the cage and looked at the scurrying rodents.

David scarcely breathed.

Marley only nodded. "Well, mice are mice." He put down the cage and turned away. "These look just like the ones I saw when I was here eight or ten years ago. Same white patch on the forelimbs. I never knew mice

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could live that long."

"But—" began Lanza, bending over to study the mice.

"What an amazing memory you have, Leader," said David. "Just as you guessed, these mice are the direct descendants of the ones you saw on your former visit, a special mutant strain. The chief difference is that these are marked with white patches on the *right* forelimbs, while, as I am sure you recall, the original specimens were marked on the *left* forelimbs. Odd how these marks run in families, isn't it?"

Lanza put down the cage and strolled toward the door as Marley took a last bored look around.

"Nothing new here that I ought to see, Lanza?"

"No. Nothing new."

"Well, I've no time to waste. I've come here for two reasons, Dr. Wong. We both want a booster shot for Blue Martian. Ten years is a long time, and there's been this epidemic."

"Which is now under control."

"That may be, but I still want a booster. You Research people don't always know as much as you think you do. When that's done, I want a detailed report of your progress on White Martian."

"I shall be hapy to give it," said David. "If you will go directly to my office, I'll pick up the vaccine and syringes, and be with you in a few minutes."

Marley and Officer Magnun marched to the door, and David followed, standing aside to let Lanza precede him. Lanza hesitated there, staring at the floor. Then he smiled and looked directly at David.

"Beautiful spring weather we are having. I'm wondering about the marvelous order of nature. Did you happen to notice, this morning, whether the Sun did actually rise in the east?"

David stared at the retreating back. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. Lanza knew. What was he going to do?

"Hurry up, Doctor," said Officer Magnun from the doorway.

"Right away." He opened the refrigerator and inspected the two groups of red-capped vials sitting on the shelf. He had no time to think, no time to weigh pros and cons; he could only act. Choosing two vials, he added them to the sterile kit from the autoclave, and took a last look around.

He noticed his watch still hanging on the wall, and the lab coat which covered his leather pencil case. He started to take them, then slowly dropped his hand and touched the intercom.

"Get me Dr. Karl Haslam."

"You're keeping the Leader waiting," said Magnun, but David paid no attention.

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"Dr. Haslam? Dr. Wong speaking. I may be a little late getting up to see those precipitates of yours. But you keep them simmering, just in case. It's very probable that the antibody curve will rise. . . . Yes, I'll let you know if I can."

Magnun followed him to the office, then strolled away for a chat with Watchguard Jones.

David put his things on his desk and made his preparations in businesslike fashion while Marley and Lanza glanced curiously around the office. He watched apprehensively as Marley inspected the bookcase, then turned away.

"I never could understand why Research needs so many books," he remarked.

"Please roll up your sleeve, Leader Marley. I'm ready for you now."

Deftly he assembled the syringe, filled it to the two centimeter mark, and scrubbed the arm presented to him.

"Ready?" He inserted the needle and slowly expelled the fluid. Then, taking a fresh syringe, he repeated the operation, filling from the second vial.

"Why do those bottles have different numbers?" asked Marley. "Aren't we getting the same thing?"

"Certainly. Just lab routine, so we can keep track of how many units have been used from our stock. There, that does it, Lanza. Both of you will be perfectly safe for a good many years to come."

He was washing his hands at the sink when he heard a struggle at the door. Turning, he saw Leah, thin, gaunt and terrified, held fast in the grip of Officer Magnun, who forced her inside and slammed the door behind them.

"What's the meaning of this intrusion?" demanded Marley.

"There's some funny business going on, Leader," said Magnun. "I caught this woman trying to sneak in here. She says she's Miss Hachovnik and she works here. Only she ain't. I arrested Miss Hachovnik myself, and I remember well enough what she looked like. She was a cute chick, not a bit like this dame."

Marley was staring at the sobbing girl, eyes blinking as he thought, looked back, remembered. Slowly his eyes shifted to David, and David felt like a man impaled.

"You may leave, Magnun," said the Leader.

"You don't want me to arrest this woman?"

"Let go of her! I said you may leave!"

"As you say, Leader."

When the door closed, the room throbbed to Leah's sobs.

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"I couldn't help it, Dr. Wong," she cried. "I got so bored, sitting and looking at those books, day after day, with nothing to do! I thought I'd just slip down here for an hour and say hello to people, and—"

"Quiet, Hachovnik!" roared Marley. He quieted his voice. "I understand now, Wong. I remember. There were two girls. Twins. The one in Psycho-detention, according to Officer Magnun, is still beautiful and young. It's no use, Wong. You do know the secret of immortality. And you told me the Phoenix was only a fairy tale!"

DAVID felt entirely calm. Whatever might happen now, at least the suspense was over. He had done all he could, and it was a relief to have things in the open. He thought fleetingly of his colleagues, alerted by his message, frantically putting their plans into operation, but he leaned back against the sink with every appearance of ease.

"You're not quite right, Leader Marley. I cannot confer immortality. All I am able to do is stave off the aging process."

"That will do me nicely. And it's connected somehow with the Blue Martian virus?"

"Yes. The disease serves as the vehicle."

With a brisk motion, Marley drew his needler from his breast pocket and aimed it steadily at David. "*Give it to me!*"

"You're rather ambiguous," said David. How were his friends getting along? Were they ready yet? Had Karl visited the basement lab? "Do you mean you want me to give you the injection to prolong your life, or the secret of how to do it, or what?"

"Don't quibble! First you'll give me the injection to make me immortal. Then you'll turn over to me all your notes on procedure. Then my friend here will needle you with a shaft of electrons and end your interest in the problem."

"Surely you won't keep such a good thing all for yourself," said David. "What about Dr. Lanza? He's your right-hand man. Don't you want him to live forever, too? What about Officer Magnun? He's a faithful servant."

"You're stalling, Wong. Do you want me to kill you now?"

"It won't be wise to needle me yet, Leader Marley. The secret would be lost forever."

"I'll have your notes!"

"Yes? Try to read them. They're written in Coptic, a dead language that you consider it a waste of time to learn, because such knowledge is impractical. There aren't half a dozen men on Earth who could make head

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or tail of my notebook."

"Then I'll find that half-dozen! I want the injection." He gestured with the gleaming weapon.

"This is once when I have no Free Choice," said David. "Very well." He started toward the door, but halted at the roar of command.

"Stop! Do you think I'm fool enough to let you out of my sight?"

"But I have to get the inoculant."

"Use the intercom. Send for it."

David slumped into the chair and opened the intercom. He could almost feel the electronic shaft of the needler ripping into his body. His heart beat wildly, and the tension of adrenalin ran through his body. His lips felt cold, but he held them steady as he spoke into the dial.

"Get me Dr. Haslam. . . . Karl? David Wong speaking. Will you send someone up with a vial of phoenix special? The precipitates? I should say the antibody titer has reached the danger point. Don't delay treatment any longer."

Silently they waited. Marley's grim face did not relax; his eyes were alight. Leah lay back in her chair with closed eyes, and Lanza stared intently at the floor.

A soft knock came at the door, and a female technician hurried in, carrying a tray.

"I'm sorry to be so slow, Dr. Wong. Dr. Haslam had a little trouble locating the right vial. Oh, and he said to tell you not to worry about those precipitates. They're taken care of."

"Just a minute," said David. "Leader Marley, Miss Hachovnik here is very ill. Won't you let this girl help her to the rest room? She'll be safe there until you're ready for her."

Marley looked at the half-fainting woman. "All right. You take her there, Lanza, and this girl too. Lock them in. And she's not to talk. Do you understand? She's not to talk!"

"As you say, Leader Marley," the technician whispered. She helped Leah to her feet, and Lanza followed them from the room.

Marley closed the door and locked it. "Now, then, Wong, give me that shot, and heaven help you if you try any tricks!"

"Will you bare your arm while I prepare the syringe?"

Awkwardly hanging onto the needler, Marley tugged at his sleeve while David calmly picked up a bottle of colorless liquid and filled his syringe. He turned to the Leader, swabbed his arm, then picked up the syringe.

"There you are," said David.

Jerking the syringe upward, he forced a thin jet of pure alcohol

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into the man's eyes. Marley screamed. Agonizing pain blinded him, and as he clutched at his eyes, David snatched the needler from the writhing fingers, and flashed the electronic dagger straight to the heart.

He stared at the twitching body for only an instant. People were pounding on the door, shouting. He tugged at the desk drawer to get his notebook, then remembered sickly that he had left his keys in the lab. He would have to leave his notes.

The shouts were growing louder, people were battering the door. Swiftly he moved to the bookcase, swung it away from the wall, and dropped into darkness.

He brought the bookcase back, then turned and ran along the black passageway.

LEADER Lanza sat in his suite at State House, conferring with his subordinates.

"It hardly seems possible, Magnun, that so many people could have slipped through your fingers without help from the Military. You say both the Hachovnik twins have disappeared?"

"Yes, Leader."

"And how many people from the Institute?"

"Six, Leader. But it didn't do them any good. We got them, all right."

"But you found no bodies!"

"They wouldn't *have* bodies after we got through with them, Leader."

"You're quite certain, Officer Magnun, that all the fugitives were destroyed?"

Lanza looked tired, and his officers noticed in him a lack of firmness, an indecision, to which they were not accustomed in a Leader.

"Say, those babies never had a chance, Leader. We picked up their roboplanes somewhere over Kansas, and we shot them out of the air like ducks. They didn't even fire back. They just crashed, burned, disintegrated. They won't give you any more trouble. Why, we even picked up the remains of Doc Wong's wristwatch and that old beat-up pencil case of his." He flung them on the desk.

Lanza fingered the charred and molten relics.

"That will do, Magnun. I'll call you when I need you."

"Say, ain't you feeling well, Leader? You look kind of green."

"That will be all, Magnun!"

"As you say, Leader."

Lanza shoved aside the charred remnants and spread out the papers waiting for him, the unimportant, miscellaneous notes accumulated over the years by Hudson, Fauré, and Haslam. And the unreadable notebook of David Wong. He sighed and

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looked up as his secretary entered.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Leader. You look tired."

"The funeral this morning was quite an ordeal, and so much has happened the last three days!"

"Well, I thought you ought to know that strange reports are coming in. Some of our most prominent citizens have disappeared. We're trying to trace them, of course, but—"

"Anything more?"

"Those rumors about Blue Martian are cropping up again."

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"Yes? And—?"

"That old man you asked me to bring from the Vermont quarries, the one who was detained for illegal study of the Coptic language? Well, I guess the excitement of his release was too much for him. He died of a heart attack when he was being taken to the plane."

Lanza sighed. "Very well, that will be all."

Alone at last, he looked sadly through the pages of David's notebook, at the tantalizing curls and angles of the Coptic letters, cryptic symbols of a discovery which prevented a man from growing old. Well, no one could read them now. That secret was dead, along with its discoverer, because, in this world, no study was permitted without a practical end in view. And perhaps it was just as well. Could any man be trusted, he wondered, to deal wisely with a power so great?

After closing the notebook, he dropped his head into his hands.

How his head ached! He felt cold, suddenly, and his whole body began to shake with a hard chill. He lifted his head, his vision blurred, and suddenly he knew.

He had Blue Martian fever!

Teeth chattering, he paced wildly about the room, puzzling things out, trying to remember. That booster shot! And then he

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realized the amazing truth: David Wong had given him a chance! He had inoculated him with the seeds of immortality, giving him a chance to help right the wrongs of this Categorized world. And now he was left alone in a world of mortals. David and the others had been annihilated, and he was left to live on and on, alone.

He staggered toward his private apartments, then sank into his chair as his secretary once again ran into the room. With a supreme effort he controlled his trembling.

"Yes?"

"Leader Lanza. Another report."

"Just a minute," said Lanza, trying to bring his eyes into focus on the excited girl. "I am in need of a rest. As soon as you have gone, I shall retire into seclusion for a few days. There are to be no interruptions. Is that clear? Now, proceed."

"There's a new epidemic of Martian Fever reported where one never was before."

He stirred tiredly. "Where now?"

"South America. Somewhere in the Andes."

"I think we'll have just one Category after this," said Lanza dreamily. "Category Phoenix."

"What did you say, Leader?"

His thoughts wandered. No wonder Magnun's men found no bodies. The planes they shot down were roboplanes, after all, and it was easy to plant in an empty seat a man's wristwatch and his bulky leather pencil case. David and the others were safe now. They were free and had enough time to plan for the new free world.

"What did you say, Leader?" the girl repeated, bewildered.

"Nothing. It doesn't matter." He frowned painfully, and then shrugged. "On second thought, I may be away longer than a week. If anyone asks for me, say I'm on an Aimless Tramp. I've always hoped that some day I might earn the right to a Free Choice."

"But you're the Leader," the girl said in astonishment. "You're entitled to all the Free Choices you want!"

He lifted his twitching head, smiling wanly. "It would seem that way, wouldn't it? Well, whether I am or not, I think I've really earned a Free Choice. I wonder," he said in a wistful voice, "whether the climate in the Andes is hospitable."

—BOYD ELLANBY

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LOST MEMORY

By PETER PHILLIPS

Naturally, any sick person should be given medical help, even if he's from space. But what if he could not ever have been alive?

I COLLAPSED joints and hung up to talk with Dak-whirr. He blinked his eyes in some discomfort.

"What do you want, Palil?" he asked complainingly.

"As if you didn't know."

"I can't give you permission to examine it. The thing is being saved for inspection by the board. What guarantee do I have that you won't spoil it for them?"

I thrust confidentially at one of his body-plates. "You owe me a favor," I said. "Remember?"

"That was a long time in the past."

"Only two thousand revolu-

Illustrated by HOWARD MULLER

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tions and a reassembly ago. If it wasn't for me, you'd be eroding in a pit. All I want is a quick look at its thinking part. I'll vrull the consciousness without laying a single pair of pliers on it."

He went into a feedback twitch, an indication of the conflict between his debt to me and his self-conceived duty.

Finally he said, "Very well, but keep tuned to me. If I warn that a board member is coming, remove yourself quickly. Anyway how do you know it has consciousness? It may be mere primal metal."

"In that form? Don't be foolish. It's obviously a manufacture. And I'm not conceited enough to believe that we are the only form of intelligent manufacture in the Universe."

"Tautologous phrasing, Palil," Dak-whirr said pedantically. "There could not conceivably be 'unintelligent manufacture.' There can be no consciousness without manufacture, and no manufacture without intelligence. Therefore there can be no consciousness without intelligence. Now if you should wish to dispute—"

I tuned off his frequency abruptly and hurried away. Dak-whirr is a fool and a bore. Everyone knows there's a fault in his logic circuit, but he refuses to have it traced down and repaired. Very unintelligent of him.

THE thing had been taken into one of the museum sheds by the carriers. I gazed at it in admiration for some moments. It was quite beautiful, having suffered only slight exterior damage, and it was obviously no mere conglomeration of sky metal.

In fact, I immediately thought of it as "he" and endowed it with the attributes of self-knowing, although, of course, his consciousness could not be functioning or he would have attempted communication with us.

I fervently hoped that the board, after his careful disassembly and study, could restore his awareness so that he could tell us himself which solar system he came from.

Imagine it! He had achieved our dream of many thousands of revolutions—space flight—only to be fused, or worse, in his moment of triumph.

I felt a surge of sympathy for the lonely traveler as he lay there, still, silent, non-emitting. Anyway, I mused, even if we couldn't restore him to self-knowing, an analysis of his construction might give us the secret of the power he had used to achieve the velocity to escape his planet's gravity.

In shape and size he was not unlike Swen—or Swen Two, as he called himself after his conversion—who failed so disas-

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trously to reach our satellite, using chemical fuels. But where Swen Two had placed his tubes, the stranger had a curious helical construction studded at irregular intervals with small crystals.

He was thirty-five feet tall, a gracefully tapering cylinder. Standing at his head, I could find no sign of exterior vision cells, so I assumed he had some kind of vrulling sense. There seemed to be no exterior markings at all, except the long, shallow grooves dented in his skin by scraping to a stop along the hard surface of our planet.

I am a reporter with warm current in my wires, not a cold-thinking scientist, so I hesitated before using my own vrulling sense. Even though the stranger was non-aware—perhaps permanently—I felt it would be a presumption, an invasion of privacy. There was nothing else I could do, though, of course.

I started to vrull, gently at first, then harder, until I was positively glowing with effort. It was incredible; his skin seemed absolutely impermeable.

The sudden realization that metal could be so alien nearly fused something inside me. I found myself backing away in horror, my self-preservation relay working overtime.

Imagine watching one of the beautiful cone-rod-and-cylinder assemblies performing the Dance of the Seven Spanners, as he's conditioned to do, and then suddenly refusing to do anything except stump around unattractively, or even becoming obstinately motionless, unresponsive. That might give you an idea of how I felt in that dreadful moment.

Then I remembered Dakwhirr's words—there could be no such thing as an "unintelligent manufacture." And a product so beautiful could surely not be evil. I overcame my repugnance and approached again.

I halted as an open transmission came from someone near at hand.

"Who gave that squeaking reporter permission to snoop around here?"

I had forgotten the museum board. Five of them were standing in the doorway of the shed, radiating anger. I recognized Chirik, the chairman, and addressed myself to him. I explained that I'd interfered with nothing and pleaded for permission on behalf of my subscribers to watch their investigation of the stranger. After some argument, they allowed me to stay.

I watched in silence and some amusement as one by one they tried to vrull the silent being from space. Each showed the same reaction as myself when they failed to penetrate the skin.

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Chirik, who is wheeled—and inordinately vain about his suspension system—flung himself back on his supports and pretended to be thinking.

"Fetch Fiff-fiff," he said at last. "The creature may still be aware, but unable to communicate on our standard frequencies."

FIFF-FIFF can detect anything in any spectrum. Fortunately he was at work in the museum that day and soon arrived in answer to the call. He stood silently near the stranger for some moments, testing and adjusting himself, then slid up the electromagnetic band.

"He's emitting," he said.

"Why can't we get him?" asked Chirik.

"It's a curious signal on an unusual band."

"Well, what does he say?"

"Sounds like utter nonsense to me. Wait, I'll relay and convert it to standard."

I made a direct recording naturally, like any good reporter.

"— after planetfall," the stranger was saying. "Last dribble of power. If you don't pick this up, my name is Entropy. Other instruments knocked to hell, airlock jammed and I'm too weak to open it manually. Becoming delirious, too, I guess. Getting strong undirectional ultra-wave reception in Inglish, craziest stuff you ever heard, like goblins muttering, and I know we were the only ship in this sector. If you pick this up, but can't get a fix in time, give my love to the boys in the mess. Signing off for another couple of hours, but keeping this channel open and hoping . . ."

"The fall must have deranged him," said Chirik, gazing at the stranger. "Can't he see us or hear us?"

"He couldn't hear you properly before, but he can now, through me," Fiff-fiff pointed out. "Say something to him, Chirik."

"Hello," said Chirik doubtfully. "Er—welcome to our planet. We are sorry you were hurt by your fall. We offer you the hospitality of our assembly shops. You will feel better when you are repaired and repowered. If you will indicate how we can assist you—"

"What the hell! What ship is that? Where are you?"

"We're here," said Chirik. "Can't you see us or vrull us? Your vision circuit is impaired, perhaps? Or do you depend entirely on vrulling? We can't find your eyes and assumed either that you protected them in some way during flight, or dispensed with vision cells altogether in your conversion."

Chirik hesitated, continued apologetically: "But we cannot understand how you vrull, either.

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While we thought that you were unaware, or even completely fused, we tried to vrull you. Your skin is quite impervious to us, however."

The stranger said: "I don't know if you're batty or I am. What distance are you from me?"

Chirik measured quickly. "One meter, two-point-five centimeters from my eyes to your nearest point. Within touching distance, in fact." Chirik tentatively put out his hand. "Can you not feel me, or has your contact sense also been affected?"

It became obvious that the stranger had been pitifully deranged. I reproduce his words phonetically from my record, although some of them make little sense. Emphasis, punctuative pauses and spelling of unknown terms are mere guesswork, of course.

He said: "For godsakemann stop talking nonsense, whoever you are. If you're outside, can't you see the airlock is jammed? Can't shift it myself. I'm badly hurt. Get me out of here, please."

"Get you out of where?" Chirik looked around, puzzled. "We brought you into an open shed near our museum for a preliminary examination. Now that we know you're intelligent, we shall immediately take you to our assembly shops for healing and recuperation. Rest assured that you'll have the best possible attention."

THERE was a lengthy pause before the stranger spoke again, and his words were slow and deliberate. His bewilderment is understandable, I believe, if we remember that he could not see, vrull or feel.

He asked: "What manner of creature are you? Describe yourself."

Chirik turned to us and made a significant gesture toward his thinking part, indicating gently that the injured stranger had to be humored.

"Certainly," he replied. "I am an unspecialized bipedal manufacture of standard proportions, lately self-converted to wheeled traction, with a hydraulic suspension system of my own devising which I'm sure will interest you when we restore your sense circuits."

There was an even longer silence.

"You are robots," the stranger said at last. "Crise knows how you got here or why you speak Inglish, but you must try to understand me. I am mann. I am a friend of your master, your maker. You must fetch him to me at once."

"You are not well," said Chirik firmly. "Your speech is incoherent and without meaning. Your fall

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has obviously caused several serious feedbacks of a very serious nature. Please lower your voltage. We are taking you to our shops immediately. Reserve your strength to assist our specialists as best you can in diagnosing your troubles."

"Wait. You must understand. You are—ogodno that's no good. Have you no memory of mann? The words you use—what meaning have they for you? *Manufacture*—made by hand hand hand damyou. *Healing*. Metal is not healed. *Skin*. Skin is not metal. *Eyes*. Eyes are not scanning cells. Eyes grow. Eyes are soft. My eyes are soft. Mine eyes have seen the glory — steady on, sun. Get a grip. Take it easy. You out there listen."

"Out where?" asked Prrr-chuk, deputy chairman of the museum board.

I shook my head sorrowfully. This was nonsense, but, like any good reporter, I kept my recorder running.

The mad words flowed on. "You call me he. Why? You have no seks. You are knewter. You are *it it it!* I am he, he who made you, sprung from shee, born of wumman. What is wumman, who is silv-ya what is shee that all her swains commend her ogod the bluds flowing again. Remember. Think back, you out there. These words were made by mann, for mann. Hurt, healing, hospitality, horror, deth by loss of blud. *Deth. Blud*. Do you understand these words? Do you remember the soft things that made you? Soft little mann who konkurred the Galaxy and made sentient slaves of his machines and saw the wonders of a million worlds, only this miserable representative has to die in lonely desperation on a far planet, hearing goblin voices in the darkness."

HERE my recorder reproduces a most curious sound, as though the stranger were using an ancient type of vibratory molecular vocalizer in a gaseous medium to reproduce his words before transmission, and the insulation on his diaphragm had come adrift.

It was a jerky, high-pitched, strangely disturbing sound; but in a moment the fault was corrected and the stranger resumed transmission.

"Does blud mean anything to you?"

"No," Chirik replied simply.

"Or deth?"

"No."

"Or wor?"

"Quite meaningless."

"What is your origin? How did you come into being?"

"There are several theories," Chirik said. "The most popular one — which is no more than a

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grossly unscientific legend, in my opinion — is that our manufacturer fell from the skies, imbedded in a mass of primal metal on which He drew to erect the first assembly shop. How He came into being is left to conjecture. My own theory, however —"

"Does legend mention the shape of this primal metal?"

"In vague terms, yes. It was cylindrical, of vast dimensions."

"An interstellar vessel," said the stranger.

"That is my view also," said Chirik complacently. "And —"

"What was the supposed appearance of your — manufacturer?"

"He is said to have been of magnificient proportions, based harmoniously on a cubical plan, static in Himself, but equipped with a vast array of senses."

"An automatic computer," said the stranger.

He made more curious noises, less jerky and at a lower pitch than the previous sounds.

He corrected the fault and went on: "God that's funny. A ship falls, menn are no more, and an automatic computer has pupps. Oh, yes, it fits in. A self-setting computer and navigator, operating on verbal orders. It learns to listen for itself and know itself for what it is, and to absorb knowledge. It comes to hate menn — or at least their bad qualities — so it deliberately crashes the ship and pulps their puny bodies with a calculated nicety of shock. Then it propagates and does a dam fine job of selective erasure on whatever it gave its pupps to use for a memory. It passes on only the good it found in menn, and purges the memory of him completely. Even purges all of his vocabulary except scientific terminology. Oil is thicker than blud. So may they live without the burden of knowing that they are — ogod they must know, they must understand. You outside, what happened to this manufacturer?"

Chirik, despite his professed disbelief in the supernormal aspects of the ancient story, automatically made a visual sign of sorrow.

"Legend has it," he said, "that after completing His task, He fused himself beyond possibility of healing."

ABRUPT, low-pitched noises came again from the stranger. "Yes. He would. Just in case any of His pupps should give themselves forbidden knowledge and an infeeryorrity komplecks by probing his mnemonic circuits. The perfect self-sacrificing muther. What sort of environment did He give you? Describe your planet."

Chirik looked around at us

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again in bewilderment, but he replied courteously, giving the stranger a description of our world.

"Of course," said the stranger. "Of course. Sterile rock and metal suitable only for you. But there must be some way. . ."

He was silent for a while.

"Do you know what growth means?" he asked finally. "Do you have anything that grows?"

"Certainly," Chirik said helpfully. "If we should suspend a crystal of some substance in a saturated solution of the same element or compound —"

"No, no," the stranger interrupted. "Have you nothing that grows of itself, that fruktiffies and gives increase without your intervention?"

"How could such a thing be?"

"Criseallmytee I should have guessed. If you had one blade of gras, just one tiny blade of growing gras, you could extrapolate from that to me. Green things, things that feed on the rich brest of erth, cells that divide and multiply, a cool grove of treez in a hot summer, with tiny warm-bludded burds preening their fethers among the leeves; a feeld of spring weet with newbawn mise timidly threading the dangerous jungul of storks; a stream of living water where silver fish dart and pry and feed and procreate; a farm yard where things grunt and cluck and greet the new day with the stirring pulse of life, with a surge of blud. Blud — "

For some inexplicable reason, although the strength of his carrier wave remained almost constant, the stranger's transmission seemed to be growing fainter.

"His circuits are failing," Chirik said. "Call the carriers. We must take him to an assembly shop immediately. I wish he would reserve his power."

My presence with the museum board was accepted without question now. I hurried along with them as the stranger was carried to the nearest shop.

I now noticed a circular marking in that part of his skin on which he had been resting, and guessed that it was some kind of orifice through which he would have extended his planetary traction mechanism if he had not been injured.

He was gently placed on a disassembly cradle. The doctor in charge that day was Chur-chur, an old friend of mine. He had been listening to the two-way transmissions and was already acquainted with the case.

CHUR-CHUR walked thoughtfully around the stranger.

"We shall have to cut," he said. "It won't pain him, since his intra-molecular pressure and contact senses have failed. But since

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we can't vrull him, it'll be necessary for him to tell us where his main brain is housed or we might damage it."

Fiff-fiff was still relaying, but no amount of power boost would make the stranger's voice any clearer. It was quite faint now, and there are places on my recorder tape from which I cannot make even the roughest phonetic transliteration.

". . . strength going. Can't get into my zoot . . . done for if they bust through lock, done for if they don't . . . must tell them I need oxygen . . ."

"He's in bad shape, desirous of extinction," I remarked to Chur-chur, who was adjusting his arc-cutter. "He wants to poison himself with oxidation now."

I shuddered at the thought of that vile, corrosive gas he had mentioned, which causes that almost unmentionable condition we all fear — rust.

Chirik spoke firmly through Fiff-fiff. "Where is your thinking part, stranger? Your central brain?"

"In my head," the stranger replied. "In my head ogod my head . . . eyes blurring everything going dim . . . luv to mairee . . . kids . . . a carry me home to the lone prayree . . . get this bluddy airlock open then they'll see me die . . . but they'll see me . . . some kind of atmosphere with this gravity . . . see me die . . . extrapolate from body what I was . . . what they are damthem damthem damthem . . . mann . . . master . . . I AM YOUR MAKER!"

For a few seconds the voice rose strong and clear, then faded away again and dwindled into a combination of those two curious noises I mentioned earlier. For some reason that I cannot explain, I found the combined sound very disturbing despite its faintness. It may be that it induced some kind of sympathetic oscillation.

Then came words, largely incoherent and punctuated by a kind of surge like the sonic vibrations produced by variations of pressure in a leaking gas-filled vessel.

". . . done it . . . crawling into chamber, closing inner . . . must be mad . . . they'd find me anyway . . . but finished . . . want see them before I die . . . want see them see me . . . liv few seconds, watch them . . . get outer one open . . ."

Chur-chur had adjusted his arc to a broad, clean, blue-white glare. I trembled a little as he brought it near the edge of the circular marking in the stranger's skin. I could almost feel the disruption of the intra-molecular sense currents in my own skin.

"Don't be squeamish, Palil," Chur-chur said kindly. "He can't

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feel it now that his contact sense has gone. And you heard him say that his central brain is in his head." He brought the cutter firmly up to the skin. "I should have guessed that. He's the same shape as Swen Two, and Swen very logically concentrated his main thinking part as far away from his explosion chambers as possible."

RIVULETS of metal ran down into a tray which a calm assistant had placed on the ground for that purpose. I averted my eyes quickly. I could never steel myself enough to be a surgical engineer or assembly technician.

But I had to look again, fascinated. The whole area circumscribed by the marking was beginning to glow.

Abruptly the stranger's voice returned, quite strongly, each word clipped, emphasized, high-pitched.

"Ar no no no . . . god my hands . . . they're burning through the lock and I can't get back I can't get away . . . stop it you feens stop it can't you hear . . . I'll be burned to deth I'm here in the airlock . . . the air's getting hot you're burning me alive . . ."

Although the words made little sense, I could guess what had happened and I was horrified.

"Stop, Chur-chur," I pleaded. "The heat has somehow brought back his skin currents. It's hurting him."

Chur-chur said reassuringly: "Sorry, Palil. It occasionally happens during an operation—probably a local thermo-electric effect. But even if his contact senses have started working again and he can't switch them off, he won't have to bear this very long."

Chirik shared my unease, however. He put out his hand and awkardly patted the stranger's skin.

"Easy there," he said. "Cut out your senses if you can. If you can't, well, the operation is nearly finished. Then we'll repower you, and you'll soon be fit and happy again, healed and fitted and reassembled."

I decided that I liked Chirik very much just then. He exhibited almost as much self-induced empathy as any reporter; he might even come to like my favorite blue stars, despite his cold scientific exactitude in most respects.

My recorder tape shows, in its reproduction of certain sounds, how I was torn away from this strained reverie.

During the one-and-a-half seconds since I had recorded the distinct vocables "burning me alive," the stranger's words had become quite blurred, running together and rising even higher in pitch until they reached a sus-

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tained note—around E-flat in the standard sonic scale.

It was not like a voice at all.

This high, whining noise was suddenly modulated by apparent words, but without changing its pitch. Transcribing what seem to be words is almost impossible, as you can see for yourself—this is the closest I can come phonetically:

"Eeee ahahmbeeeeing baked aliiive in an uvennn ahdeeerjeee-sussunmuuutherrr!"

The note swooped higher and higher until it must have neared supersonic range, almost beyond either my direct or recorded hearing.

Then it stopped as quickly as a contact break.

And although the soft hiss of the stranger's carrier wave carried on without perceptible diminution, indicating that some degree of awareness still existed, I experienced at that moment one of those quirks of intuition given only to reporters:

I felt that I would never greet the beautiful stranger from the sky in his full senses.

CHUR-CHUR was muttering to himself about the extreme toughness and thickness of the stranger's skin. He had to make four complete cutting revolutions before the circular mass of nearly white-hot metal could be pulled away by a magnetic grapple.

A billow of smoke puffed out of the orifice. Despite my repugnance, I thought of my duty as a reporter and forced myself to look over Chur-chur's shoulder.

The fumes came from a soft, charred, curiously shaped mass of something which lay just inside the opening.

"Undoubtedly a kind of insulating material," Chur-chur explained.

He drew out the crumpled blackish heap and placed it carefully on a tray. A small portion broke away, showing a red, viscid substance.

"It looks complex," Chur-chur said, "but I expect the stranger will be able to tell us how to reconstitute it or make a substitute."

His assistant gently cleaned the wound of the remainder of the material, which he placed with the rest; and Chur-chur resumed his inspection of the orifice.

You can, if you want, read the technical accounts of Chur-chur's discovery of the stranger's double skin at the point where the cut was made; of the incredible complexity of his driving mechanism, involving principles which are still not understood to this day; of the museum's failure to analyze the exact nature and function of the insulating material found in only that one portion

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of his body; and of the other scientific mysteries connected with him.

But this is my personal, non-scientific account. I shall never forget hearing about the greatest mystery of all, for which not even the most tentative explanation has been advanced, nor the utter bewilderment with which Churchur announced his initial findings that day.

He had hurriedly converted himself to a convenient size to permit actual entry into the stranger's body.

When he emerged, he stood in silence for several minutes. Then, very slowly, he said:

"I have examined the 'central brain' in the forepart of his body. It is no more than a simple auxiliary computer mechanism. It does not possess the slightest trace of consciousness. And there is no other conceivable center of intelligence in the remainder of his body."

There is something I wish I could forget. I can't explain why it should upset me so much. But I always stop the tape before it reaches the point where the voice of the stranger rises in pitch, going higher and higher until it cuts out.

There's a quality about that noise that makes me tremble and think of rust.

—PETER PHILLIPS

S-F Checklist

WITH science fiction books being published in ever-increasing numbers these days, yesterday's brand-new sensation is likely to be today's forgotten dust-catcher. But that's not at all the case with the s-f novels brought out by Simon and Schuster in the past few years. Even the two modern masterpieces that led off the list—van Vogt's imaginative *The World of Ā*, and Williamson's gripping *The Humanoids*—are still in demand, and still available (although only limited quantities remain).

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Wheels Within

By CHARLES DE VET

Never ask "Who am I and where do I come from?" The answers may not be what you'd expect!

Illustrated by DON SIBLEY

"WHEN did the headaches first start?" asked the neurologist, Dr. Hall.

"About six months ago," Bennett replied.

"What is your occupation, Mr. Bennett?"

"I am a contractor."

"Are you happy in your work?"

"Very. I prefer it to any other occupation I know of."

"When your headaches become sufficiently severe, you say that you have hallucinations," Hall said. "Can you describe what you see during those hallucinations?"

"At first I had only the impression that I was in a place completely unlike anything I had ever known," Bennett answered. "But each time my impressions became sharper, and I carried a fairly clear picture when my mind returned to normal the last time. I felt then that I had been in a room in a tall building that towered thousands of feet over a great city. I even remembered

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that the name of the city was Thone. There were other people in the room with me—one person especially. I remembered her very clearly."

"Her?" Hall asked.

"Yes."

"Was there anything unusual about this woman?"

"Well, yes, there was," Bennett said, after a brief and almost embarrassed pause. "This will sound pretty adolescent, but—"

Hall leaned forward attentively. "It may be relevant. You're not here to be judged, you know; I'm trying to help you."

Bennett nodded and spoke rapidly, as though trying to finish before he could stop himself. "She was a woman who exactly fitted an image I've had in mind for as long as I can remember. She was tall, fair—though brunette—very beautiful, very vivid, very well poised. I seem to have known her all my life, but only in my dreams, from my very earliest ones to the present. She's never changed in all that time."

He halted as suddenly as he had begun to talk, either having nothing more to say, or unwilling to say it.

"Have you ever married, Mr. Bennett?" Hall prodded gently.

"No, I never have." Again, Bennett stopped, adding nothing more to his blunt answer.

"May I ask why not?"

Bennett turned his face away. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that. It makes me sound like a romantic kid." He looked at the doctor almost in defiance. "I've always felt that some day I would meet this girl, or at least someone very much like her. I know it's not a rational feeling—maybe I've even used it as an excuse not to get married—but it's like spilling salt and throwing a pinch over our shoulder; we aren't superstitious, yet we don't take any chances."

Dr. Hall didn't comment. He ended the questioning period and put Bennett through a series of tests. Then they sat down again and Hall offered his diagnosis.

"The neurological examination is essentially negative, Mr. Bennett. In other words, there is no organic reason that I can find for your headaches. That leaves only one other possibility — an emotional disturbance. I'm a neurologist, remember, not a psychoanalyst. I can only give an opinion about the cause of your complaint."

Bennett waited expectantly.

"Headaches without organic causes are generally the result of repressed anger," Hall went on. "That anger can stem from any number of traumatic situations or attitudes, all deeply buried in the unconscious, of course, or they would not have the power

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to hurt us. From what we know of you, however, it seems to be the result of frustration. In other words, you have created a fantasy image of a completely unattainable woman, and therefore none of the women you meet can fulfill your expectations. Since she is unattainable, you naturally feel a sense of frustration."

"But who could she be?" Bennett asked anxiously.

"Someone you knew in childhood, perhaps. A composite of real and imaginary women. Usually, it is an idealized image of your own mother."

Bennett sat frowning. "All right, let's say that's so. But where do the hallucinations of the city of Thone fit in?"

"This is something that has to be tracked down in a series of analytical sessions, so all I can do is guess. If one is unable to reach a goal in a real environment, the obvious answer is to create a fantasy world. That's what you appear to be doing. It's a dangerous situation. Mr. Bennett. Potentially, at least."

"How so?" Bennett asked, alarmed.

"The general tendency is toward greater and greater divorcement from reality. I suggest immediate treatment by a competent analyst. If you don't know of one, I can recommend several."

"I'd like to think it over."

"Do that," Hall said. "And call me when you've decided."

THE third day after he consulted the neurologist, Bennett's headache returned. As before, drugs were of no help. When the pain became blinding, he lay back on his bed, placed a cold cloth on his forehead, and closed his eyes.

Suddenly the realities he knew were gone and he was back in the dream-city of Thone.

Persons and objects were much clearer now. Bennett saw that he lay in a receptacle shaped like a rectangular metal box. It was padded, reminding him unpleasantly of a coffin. The woman he had seen before was again with him, but now he knew that her name was Lima. Behind her stood a man; a tall, dark man whose eyebrows joined over the bridge of his nose, and whose forehead was creased in a permanent frown. The woman held out her arms to Bennett. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Bennett's spirit seemed to rise from the flesh—he could see his body still lying there—and he followed the woman. As he approached she retreated and, try as he would to reach her, she remained just beyond his grasp.

After what seemed hours of futile pursuit, a cloud formed be-

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tween him and the woman. When it dissipated, he had left the world of Thone. He was in a trolley-bus, in his own world, and vaguely he recalled having left his room, gone down to the street, and boarded the trolley—during the time he had followed Lima, in his hallucination. It seemed that he had a definite destination then, but now he could not recall what it had been.

His attention was drawn to the outside by the flickering of lights that flashed in through the bus windows. Bennett looked out and saw that he was in the Pleasure Section of the city, traveling through the Street of Carnivals. He watched the fronts of the amusement buildings pass before him and he read their advertisements listlessly.

Suddenly one sign seemed to spring out from all the others:

LIMA
MYSTIC OF THE MIND

He left the trolley at the next corner and made his way through the crowd to the brightly lit carnival building.

Inside, he found a chair and seated himself. The show's act appeared about half over. It was pretty evidently charlatan stuff, Bennett decided, but the black-hooded mystic on the stage held his attention. She was a tall woman, with a slender figure and fair flesh. She was poised, or perhaps it was indifference to the crowd.

A runner went through the audience touching articles of clothing or ornaments, and the woman without hesitation named each one he touched. The act was slightly different from most Bennett had seen in that the runner said nothing, merely touching the articles to be named.

The next portion of the show consisted of a mind-reading act. Bennett expected the usual routine of writing a question on paper, which would be sealed in an envelope and placed in a container on the stage.

He was surprised when the runner returned to the crowd and asked for volunteers for thought-reading.

A short man with a bright yellow necktie raised his hand. The runner made his way through the crowd to the man and touched him on the shoulder before turning back to the mystic. He still said nothing.

"This man is thinking that he should have stayed at home tonight," the mystic said. "There are wrestling matches on the teletone, and he would have enjoyed them more than this show. Besides, he would have spent less money that way than he has tonight. And he does not like to

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spend money unless he must."

A titter of amusement went through the crowd as the man blushed a dull crimson.

The runner touched a second man.

"This man wishes to know the winner in the eighth race at the horse tracks tomorrow," she said. "I am sorry, but, because of Public Law one thousand thirty-two, Section five-A, I am prohibited from answering a question of that nature."

The third person contacted was a woman. She raised her hand, then half changed her mind when she saw that the runner was turning toward her. But then she defiantly tossed her brown hair back from her face and allowed him to touch her shoulder.

"This woman is wondering if her lover is true to her—and if her husband will find out about them."

This time the crowd laughed when the embarrassed woman turned pale and rushed up the aisle toward the exit.

No further hands were raised and the show ended with a short address by the runner: "I hope you have enjoyed these truly marvelous and mysterious demonstrations. Now the mystic, Lima, is available for a short time for personal interviews. The fee is very reasonable — one dollar a minute. Anyone wishing an interview please step forward."

The mystic pulled the hood from her head, smiled, bowed at the crowd, and left the stage.

Bennett gasped.

"The woman of the city of Thone!"

"YOU have paid in advance for twenty-five minutes of my time," Lima said, as she smiled in amusement. "Perhaps you had better begin your questions, instead of merely staring at me."

Bennett brought his thoughts back with an effort. "Your performance was exceptionally good," he said very soberly. "I enjoyed it. And so, apparently did the other customers. It is a clever routine. I'll admit I can't figure out how you do it."

"Remember what Barnum said," Lima replied lightly.

"At least you do not take yourself too seriously," Bennett observed.

"On the contrary," Lima countered, "I take myself very seriously. You, however, do not. You are paying for my time and the customer is always right."

"Tell me," Bennett asked abruptly, "have we ever met before?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Have you any objections to telling me about yourself during our interview? Who are you? What is your background?"

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"I will be glad to tell you about myself, if you think it will be interesting," she replied, after a barely perceptible pause. "How I came by this exceptional ability of mine, I have no slightest conception. I only remember that when I was young, and still without the intellect to evaluate social mores and customs, I was often placed in positions of awkwardness by my ability to read minds. At an early age, however, through the council of my parents, I learned to keep this knowledge to myself.

"By the time I reached my twentieth birthday, my parents were both dead and I was alone in the world. I had never learned any occupation. I made some attempts to use my mind-reading to some advantage to myself, but soon found that I encountered the opposition of the medical associations as well as the law. As a consequence, I turned to show business as the one means of earning a legitimate livelihood. There is not much more to tell."

"Can you actually read minds?" Bennett asked insistently.

"I can."

"Then what am I thinking now?"

"You are thinking," Lima said, with no semblance of a trance or any of the other usual antics of professional mystics, "that I look exactly like a woman you have never seen, but whose image you have carried in your mind since your childhood."

For just a moment, the startling accuracy disconcerted Bennett.

"I have a problem which is quite annoying," he pushed on almost frantically. "Can you tell me what my problem is?"

"You have been subject to extremely severe headaches, which you have been unable to remedy, either by sedatives or with the help of a neurologist. Am I correct?"

"More than you could possibly know! Look, I came here believing you were a fake. That didn't matter—it was the fact that you looked like this other woman that counted. I'm convinced now. I want your help. Can you help me, or at least tell me whether the neurologist is right about the cause of my headaches?"

"He is wrong," Lima said. "I can tell you what causes them, but I am afraid that I will have to ask for another hundred dollars for that extra service."

Bennett was momentarily irritated at this evidence that their relationship, at least as far as she was concerned, was strictly business. But he shrugged off the feeling. He drew five twenty-dollar bills from his pocketbook and placed them on the table before her.

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"If you remember," Lima said, folding the money carefully and tucking it into the neck of her dress, "five months ago a building which you had contracted to build fell, when it was nearly completed, and two workmen were killed."

"I remember very well."

"You found that the collapse of the building was caused by faulty material which you had bought through a subcontractor. You are still investigating to determine where to place the blame, and are on the point of doing so."

"Go on," Bennett breathed softly.

"You are quite certain that the person responsible is John Tournay, ostensibly a reputable contractor, but actually an unscrupulous scoundrel. You have a choice of exposing him, with great personal danger to yourself —Tournay is a dangerous and ruthless man—or remaining silent and knowing that you are a coward. The difficulty of that choice is causing your headaches."

"You may be right," Bennett admitted without hesitation. "I haven't had time to think the matter through quite that far. What would you advise me to do?"

"That is something which cannot be advised. The answer lies within yourself. You are either a big enough man to do the right thing—which you yourself recognize—or you are a small man and will take the safer, less honorable course. The decision and the integrity lie within yourself."

BENNETT slumped. "I see that. Then there's nothing more that you can do for me?"

"But there is," Lima replied. "I can cure your headaches, if you wish—for an additional hundred dollars."

"That would be a cheap price." Bennett drew his wallet from his pocket. "My cash is rather low. Would you accept a personal check?"

"Certainly," Lima said. "But, first, let me explain about my cure. There is some mental unpleasantness involved which you may consider worse than the ailment."

"I doubt that. I can't imagine anything worse than this agony."

"Your mind will be placed under my control and led through a dream sequence. I will follow a logical progression of events, using your actual past as background. While you are under my control, your experiences will be far from pleasant. I will allow your mind to follow its own anticipated course of events, influencing your thoughts only slightly — directing them into as unpleasant channels as possible. In

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fact, to make the cure certain, at least the culmination must be quite devastating. Do you agree to undergo such rigorous mental punishment?"

"But why do I have to?" Bennett asked, astonished and worried.

"That pattern will act in the manner of a counter-irritant. Your mind is like a spoiled child, rejecting anticipated unpleasantness. Under my influence it is subjected to possible alternative experiences, which are so much worse than the one it originally feared that it will gratefully accept the lesser evil."

"That sounds reasonable," Bennett agreed. "When could we begin this treatment?"

"Immediately, if you are willing."

"I see no reason for waiting."

"Then, if you are ready," Lima told him, "lie on this couch. Keep your eyes on mine." She spoke slowly, evenly. "Remember that you are doing this of your own free will, that you trust me. I am your friend and would do you no harm."

Her voice droned on as Bennett looked into her eyes. They merged until they became one large, placid pool of restfulness, and he found himself drawn into them.

He sank peacefully, quietly—completely.

WHEN the telephone rang, Bennett knew it was the district attorney returning his call, and that the die was cast. Until this ugly business was brought to a conclusion, his life would be in constant danger.

"Leroy Bennett speaking," he said. "I have had collected some information that I think will be of very great interest to your office."

"Information about what?" the voice at the other end asked briskly.

"I have proof that John Tournay is responsible for the death of two men, in an action involving criminal collusion."

"If what you say is true, I will be glad to see your evidence," the district attorney said. "Could you deliver it in person? There may be some questions I would like to ask you about it."

"Certainly," Bennett replied. "When would be the most convenient time?"

"Later in the day. I have a case going on. How would four-thirty this afternoon suit you?"

"That would be fine."

The rest of the day dragged slowly. At four o'clock Bennett left his office and took the elevator to the ground floor. Under his arm he clutched the briefcase which might spell death for him.

A moment after he left his office building, he knew he had

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made a mistake—a fatal one!

Idly, at first, his mind's eye watched the driver of a long gray sedan, parked at the curb, start up its motor as he approached. The car pulled away from the curb when he came alongside it.

Through an open rear window, Bennett saw a man with a dark, brooding face—with black eyebrows that joined over the bridge of the nose—glowering at him. At the same instant he saw the blunt nose of an automatic resting on the lowered glass of the window, just below the chin of the frowning man.

Incredibly, even as he realized that he was about to die, Bennett's first thought was not one of fear, but rather that this dark man was the other person he had seen in his hallucinations of the city of Thone!

Then, as one part of his mind drew back in terror at what it knew was about to happen, another part wondered at the mystery of Thone and the people in it. Where did that hallucination fit in this mist of life which was about to end?

He felt three hard, solid blows punch shockingly into his body. There was pain, but greater than that was the terror that whipped his panicked mind.

"Lima," Bennett whispered with his last stark thought as he dropped to his knees.

He groped for the sidewalk with one hand, to steady himself, and never reached it.

"IT'S over now," Bennett heard the mystic say. "Please try to relax."

He found himself fighting with awful exertion to raise himself from the sidewalk — which had turned into a couch. His clothes clung to him with a clammy wetness that chilled him.

He flung his arms out in a frantic gesture that knocked a lamp from an end-table and sent it crashing to the floor.

Not until then did he feel the mystic's firmly gentle hands on his shoulders, urging him down, and know that he was not actually dying. He lay back for a moment, gasping great gulps of welcome air into his lungs.

"I think you will be all right now," Lima said.

"You were right when you said the experience would not be pleasant," Bennett said, still battling for breath. "I hope the results will be worth it."

"I believe you will find that they are," Lima told him reassuringly. "Also, it can be of assistance to you in still another way. The sequence your dream followed—being a natural, perhaps even a probable, aftermath of your past decisions and movements — could actually happen.

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Therefore it would be wise to avoid such decisions in real life."

AT the end of two weeks, Bennett had collected all the information he needed on Tournay's illegal activities. The investigator he hired was very thorough, and unearthed several other incriminating schemes in Tournay's past. With the evidence he had on hand, Bennett was certain that Tournay would be convicted in any court.

This time he intended to evade the fate he had suffered in the dream by acting differently. He hired a shrewd lawyer—the best obtainable—had him draw up the evidence in legal form, and presented it to the district attorney, with the demand for Tournay's immediate arrest. He knew that immediate action would be his best protection.

That evening, when he left his office building, he felt the peace of a man whose task has been well done.

It took almost a full second before the sight of the long gray car jerked his thoughts from their pleasant introspection and back to dread reality. Tournay's black-browed face leered at him as it had in the dream and he felt his body tense as it waited for the pistol slugs to strike.

His mind scurried in its trap within his head and, strangely, it turned to the mystic for help.

"Lima!" he called desperately.

AGAIN Bennett felt himself struggling with that awful exertion to drag his body from the couch on which it lay.

"It's all over now," he heard Lima say.

He sat up. "What happened?"

"This will be hard to believe," Lima said, "and I will not try to prove it to you, but it is true. The mind has many powers which cannot even be imagined by anyone who has not lived with those powers as I have. When you called me, your mind attuned itself with mine, and its need and its demand were so powerful that together we turned time backward. You are now back in my dressing room, and it is the exact time at which you originally came out of your dream."

"That's impossible!" Bennett protested.

"Nevertheless, it happened. I only ask you to keep in mind one thing. Someday, when your mind has been made more facile, you will understand how I am able to do this. It will even appear logical to you. Now, however, the only thing I can tell you is *believe it!*"

BENNETT had no intention of muffing this second chance. After he had collected the infor-

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mation about Tournay's criminal activities, he also dug into his past for a man who had cause to hate the contractor. He found the man he sought, a man as ruthless and unscrupulous as Tournay himself, one who could fight him on his own ground.

Roger Clarkson had been the controller of a string of bookie joints, before he had been framed by Tournay, and convicted, to serve ten years in prison.

Clarkson had been released from prison six days before. He found that Tournay had gained control of his former criminal empire. Everyone, including Tournay, knew that the only thing preventing Clarkson from taking revenge was the opportunity.

Bennett sent his information to Clarkson and sat back to await the results. That evening, as he was about to leave his office building, some inner caution warned him to take no chances. He stepped cautiously out into the street, looked both ways for the gray sedan, and saw that the street was empty before he walked to the corner.

He arrived there just in time to meet the long gray sedan as it drove up.

ONCE more he fought the awful exertion on the mystic's couch. This time he came out of the blackness with his mind clear. "You've saved me again," he said to Lima. "Have you turned time backward again?"

"Yes," she replied. "But I have given you all the help I can. The next attempt you make, you will have nothing on which to lean except your own strength."

"But why do I always arrive at the point where I'm being shot by Tournay, regardless of what course I choose? Is there no way I can beat him?"

"If you believe in fate as strongly as I do, you will accept that conclusion as inevitable. The long gray sedan is the symbol of your death. You cannot avoid it—at least not as long as you persist in passive action."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just this. You wish to see Tournay punished—your sense of justice demands it. But each time you try to have someone else administer that punishment. It appears to me that the only possibility of your breaking this fateful progression of events is for you to administer the punishment yourself. You probably realize the danger of trying that. But I can't see where you have any other choice."

"In other words, you feel that the only chance I have of preventing Tournay from killing me—is to kill him first?"

"Yes," Lima said. "Are you strong and hard enough to do it?"

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Bennett thought for only a brief moment before he nodded. "I'm desperate enough, at any rate."

This time he did not leave immediately. He had to find out something first. He put his arms around Lima's shoulders and drew her toward him. She put her face up and he kissed her waiting lips. They were sweet and, if she did not return the ardor of his kiss, he did not notice it.

"MR. Tournay is not in," the girl at the desk told Bennett. "You might try his home."

At a pay-booth in the lobby, Bennett called Tournay's home. The voice that answered was that of a tired woman, one who has given up hope. "Mr. Tournay called me a short time ago and said that he would be in the office of a Mr. Leroy Bennett, in the Lowry building, if anyone called," the tired voice said.

Bennett hung up and caught a cab. His quarry had walked into an ideal place for their meeting. For better or for worse, he would soon bring this conflict to an end.

In his office, Bennett found that Tournay had been there and gone. He had left a message: "Tell Mr. Bennett that Lima sent me!"

So that was it—Lima had used Bennett as a dupe! He could not figure out her purpose, but he knew that he could never trust her again. She had been against him from the first. Perhaps even she, rather than Tournay, was the prime menace. He decided that he must kill them both, before they had the chance to kill him. Touching the small flat pistol snuggling in its shoulder holster, he knew the pursuit must continue immediately.

He rode the elevator to the ground floor, and he felt his mind working with a clarity and a precision which he had seldom experienced before. This time he knew he would win.

Shrewdly, before leaving the building, Bennett looked out through the glass pane in the door first. He waited only a moment before he saw the long gray sedan as he had expected. They would not trap him again. Ducking back, he walked rapidly toward a side exit.

Night had fallen by the time he reached the carnival building. He did not ring the bell. Instead, he walked to the rear, climbed the stairs of a fire-escape, and softly opened the window of a bedroom.

He stepped inside just as softly and stood listening for breathing. He heard none. This was probably too early for Lima to be in bed.

The bedroom door was open.

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Bennett could see a light coming from another part of the apartment—probably the living room. He paused to steel himself for what he must do. The time had come when he would have to be savagely ruthless.

He found Lima sitting on a couch, reading a book. He suspected that she still had some control over his mind and he had no intention of letting her influence him. She must be killed before she could read his intention.

"It didn't work." Bennett spoke just loudly enough to startle Lima into raising her head.

As she looked up, he shot her squarely between the eyes.

In an agony of frustration, Bennett saw the flesh of her forehead remain clear and undisturbed. He knew he could not miss at this range, yet she was unhurt. He lowered his sights and shot at the white neck beneath the fair head. She still sat there, returning his gaze, unperturbed, unmarked by the bullets.

He pumped the four remaining bullets into her body. The only part of her that moved was her lips.

"It's no use, Leroy," she said. "Haven't you guessed? You are still in your dream. You can't kill me there."

Suddenly the implication struck him with its awful simplicity.

"Good God!" His voice rose. "Do you mean I've never been out of my dream?" He hesitated while the thought sank in. "My remembrance of coming out of it was only part of the dream itself," he murmured. "That was why you were able to turn time backward at will."

A cold calmness returned to him.

"Tell me," he said, "am I still in the dream?"

"Yes," Lima replied.

"Then I demand that you free me now!"

"As you wish," Lima said sadly. "And may God help you."

Bennett wrenched his body from the couch on which it lay and struggled to his feet. Though the dream had seemed real enough, he could look back on it now and see it as any other dream.

He breathed easier, and then stopped abruptly when he heard a voice behind him say, "You are still a dead man!"

Bennett whirled and found himself facing Tournay. And Tournay held a pistol aimed at his heart.

Bennett turned desperately back to Lima. His lips formed her name, but the sound died almost before it was uttered. This time, he saw, she would not help him. Her features had hardened and no mercy or compassion registered on them.

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"There is no escape," she said.

A fleeting thought went through his mind of springing at Tournay and trying to reach him before the gun could be fired. But one glance at Tournay's face made him realize how futile—and fatal—that would be.

Tournay's finger tightened on the trigger of his gun and Bennett thought ahead in despair to what was to come. One thing he knew: He did not want to die! Was there no way out?

The answer came like a cry of relief. There was a way—Thone! The city of his enigma. Tournay and Lima could not harm him there.

FOR just an instant, Bennett's vision blurred. Time paused, and the next moment he knew he had returned to Thone. The sounds of the alien city floated up to him and he stirred.

He grasped the sides of his coffinlike bed with fingers that had lost their sense of touch. He pulled himself up to a sitting position and looked about him. On one side stood Lima, though now her features were not those of the implacable, merciless mystic, but rather those of a woman in love.

She smiled happily and said, "At last you have returned."

Bennett strove to move his tongue and lips to ask questions, but they refused, as though numbed by long inaction. He turned to his other side and gazed questioningly at the replica of Tournay who stood there.

Tournay's image spoke. "We had quite a time bringing you back, Sire. But now it has been accomplished—for good."

Striving to move his throat muscles, Bennett finally forced a sound, and then words, through his lips.

"Tell me," he pleaded. "Who are you? And, more important, who am I?"

He turned to Lima for an answer, realizing that now she would help him if anyone would.

"Doctor Tournay will explain it to you," Lima replied, indicating the dark man.

Imploringly, Bennett turned back to face Tournay.

"I see that very little of your memory has returned yet," Tournay said. "In a short while, everything — all your past — will come back to you. Until then, perhaps I had better explain to you who you are. My words will help trigger your returning memory, and speed up the process."

"Please do," Bennett begged.

"You are Benn Ett, *Le Roy* of the city-state of Thone, in the year 4526 A. D. Six months ago, the strain of governing the city began to undermine your health. Acting under my advice, you de-

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cided to take a somno-rest cure.

"This rest cure," the doctor continued, "is quite standard practice in our time. We had a little difficulty bringing you out of it at the end of six months. Evidently your somno-existence must have been very pleasant."

"Do you mean that the existence I remember was merely an induced figment of my imagination?"

"Yes. You see, the best rest that can be given a mind is to give it not sleep, but pleasant work. Therefore, under my manipulation, you were given a pseudo-existence in a past era of history. You were led to conceive yourself as occupying a position, which, after close study, I deduced would be the most suitable and relaxing for you."

"But if that is true, why did my dream have to end so unpleasantly — I might say, so nearly fatally?" Bennett demanded.

"The more successful I am in choosing a pleasant existence for a patient in the somno, the more difficult it is to bring him out of it," the doctor replied. "Your unconscious mind, realizing how happy you were in your simulated existence, and how it would have to return to the rigor and stress which unnerved it before, fought with all its strength to remain where the somno had placed it.

"The usual practice in bringing a patient back to reality is for the doctor to enter the dream and convince him, by whatever means may be necessary, to return. Sometimes, however, the patient is so firmly tied to his somno-existence that drastic measures must be used. This is usually done by means of making the somno-existence so anxiety-producing that the patient is glad to return.

"Your particular release was one of the most difficult that I have ever encountered. In fact, I was unable to bring you back myself, and asked your wife, Lima, to enter the somno with me and help force you to return."

Bits of recollection, which had been edging into Bennett's memory, burst through in full force, and he remembered. It was true. He *was* Benn Ett, *Le Roy* of the city-state of Thone.

He turned to Lima and, as he read the glad light in her eyes, he knew that she had witnessed the return of his complete memory.

"Welcome home," she said.

—CHARLES V. DE VET

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Lover

What a post! The climate was grand, the service a dream — maybe too much of one. Was that why no man was allowed to stay there longer than six months?

Illustrated by WILLER

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when you're near me

By RICHARD MATHESON

THE silvery ship came rushing in backward through the veils of broken cloud, tobogganing down the atmosphere of Station Four. Fires of deceleration jetted red from the reactor ports, roaring their hurricane thrust against the clutch of gravity.

Air thickened; the glittering rocket speck slid easier, settling down like a parachuting missile. Sunlight splashed its metal sides with light and the blue ocean waters billowed wide to swallow it. The ship dipped in a wide arc and backed down toward the reddish-green-clad land.

Inside its tiny cabin, the three men lay strapped and waiting for the shock of contact. Their eyes were closed, their hands tight and blood-drained.

Muscle blocks struggled against the drag.

The ground swept up. The ship settled hard on its rear braces, trembling. Then, finally, it stood motionless and silent, successfully navigated through scores of light years of vacuum night.

A quarter mile away were the

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warehouse, village and house.

CRITICAL. That was official record. Station Four, the Three-Moon Psycho Ward: David Lindell knew it; all the Wentner men knew and wondered.

Wentner's Interstellar Trading Company put a man on other stations, for two years at a clip. Here on Four it was only for six months. Why? Because it was critical. Why? Nobody could stand the place longer than six months. Why? It always came to "why"?

"But like I always say," Lindell said, "it's no use worrying myself."

He said it to Martin, the ship's co-pilot, as the two of them trudged across the wide meadow toward the distant compound, carrying Lindell's luggage.

"You have the right idea," said Martin. "Don't worry yourself."

"That's what I always say," said Lindell. "They're paying me enough and they have to take care of me if anything happens. Its *their* headache."

They passed the silent gargantuan warehouse. The sliding doors were half open and, inside, Lindell could see the concrete floor empty and sunlight filtering bright ribbons through the skylight. Martin told him the cargo ship had emptied it out a few weeks before. Lindell grunted and shifted his luggage.

"Where are the workers?" he asked.

Martin gestured toward the native village about three hundred yards away. There was no sound from the low-slung white dwellings methodically arranged to form three sides of a rectangle. The windows blinked fiercely in the sunlight.

"Guess they're sacked down," Martin judged. "They sleep a lot when work is done. You'll see them tomorrow when shipments start coming in again."

"Got their families with them?" Lindell asked.

"Nope."

"Thought it was company policy."

"Not here. The Gnees don't have much family life. Too few men and practically all of them pretty dumb."

"Great," Lindell said. "Dandy." He shrugged. "Well, it's no use worrying myself about it."

While they were on the stairs to the hallway of the house, he asked Martin where Corrigan was.

"He went home with the cargo ship," Martin said. "The company allows that once in a while. There's nothing to do here anyway after the goods are picked up."

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"Oh," said Lindell. "What's this door?" He kicked it open and looked in at the combination living room-library.

"All the comforts of," he said.

"More," said Martin, looking over Lindell's shoulder. "Over there you have a movie projector and a tape recorder."

"Swell," Lindell said. "I can talk to myself legal." Then he grimaced. "Let's dump these bags. My arms are falling off."

They shuffled down the hall and Lindell glanced into the small kitchen as they passed. It was porcelain-paneled and well kept.

"Can this Gnee woman cook?" he asked.

"From what I hear," said Martin, "you'll be packing it in like a king."

"Glad to hear it. Incidentally, you got any idea why they call this joint the Three-Moon Psycho Ward?"

"Who calls it?"

"The boys back on Earth."

"The boys are all wet. You'll like it here."

"But why is it only a six month stint?"

"I don't know — maybe the company doesn't want its help to stay here for good," said Martin. "Here's your bedroom."

AS they entered, the Gnee woman was making the bed, her back to the door. The thumped down the bags and sh turned slowly, unalarmed o startled. Lindell's hands twitched. *Oh, well,* he thought, *I've seen worse in my day.*

She wore a heavy robe fastened at the neck and falling to the floor like a truncated cone of cloth. All he could see was her head.

It was a squat coarsely grained head, pink and hairless—like the mottled belly of an expecting chihuahua, he decided. For ears, there were cavities on the sides of her flat chinless face. Her nose was a stub, single-nostriled. Her lips were thick and monkeylike, outlining a small circle of mouth.

Hello, Lover, Lindell decided not to say.

She came across the room quietly and he blinked at her eyes. Then she placed a moist, spongy hand in his.

"Hya," he said.

"She can't hear," Martin said. "Telepathic."

"That's right, I forgot."

Hello, he thought, and *Hello* came back the answering welcome. *It is good to have you.*

"Thanks," he said. *She seems like a decent kid,* he thought to himself; *weird but homy.* A question touched his brain like a timid hand.

"Yeah, sure," he said. *Yes,* he added in his mind.

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"What's that?" Martin asked.

"She asked if she should unpack. I think." Lindell slumped down on the bed. "Ah," he said, "this I like." He pushed exploring fingers into the mattress.

"Say, how do you know it's a she?" he asked when he and Martin were walking back down the hill while the Gnee woman unpacked.

"The robe. The males don't wear robes."

"That's all?"

Martin looked away. "A few other things of absolutely no interest to you."

They moved into the living room and Lindell tried out the easy chair for size. He leaned back and stroked the arms with satisfied fingers.

"Critical or not," he said, "this station has 'em all beat for comfort."

He sat there, momentarily remembering the woman's eyes. They had seemed huge, covering a full third of her face, like big glass saucers with dark cup rings for pupils. And they were moist; bowls of liquid. He shrugged and let it go. *So what,* he thought, *it's nothing.*

"Hah? What?" he asked, hearing Martin's voice.

"I said be careful." Martin was holding up a shiny gas pistol. "This is loaded," he warned.

"Who needs it?"

"You won't. Just standard equipment." Martin dropped it back in the desk drawer and shoved the drawer back in. "And you know where all your books are," he said. "The warehouse office is set up like all the other station offices."

Lindell nodded. "I won't get lost."

Martin glanced at his watch. "Well, I have to be going. Let's see," he continued, as he and Lindell started for the door, "anything else to tell you? You know the rule about not harming the people, of course."

"Who's gonna harm them? Whoops!"

They'd almost knocked her over as they exited from the room. She jumped back one more bouncy step and stared at them, eyes wide and frightened.

"Take it easy, kiddo," Lindell soothed. "What's up?"

Eat? The thought cringed before him like a beggar at the back door of his mind.

He pursed his lips and nodded. "You took the words right out of my head."

He looked at her and concentrated. *I'll be back as soon as I walk the co-pilot to his ship. Make something good.*

She nodded violently and rushed toward the kitchen.

"Where's she off to like a bat?" Martin asked curiously, as they

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turned for the stairs.

"She's going to rustle me a snack," Lindell chuckled as they descended. "That's what I call service de luxe. This telepathy is okay, you know? At other stations it was either learn half the language to get a ham sandwich or try and teach 'em English so I wouldn't starve. Either way I really had to sweat for my supper until things got settled."

He looked pleased.

"This is real hot," he said.

Their heavy boots crushed down the tall crisp blue grass as they approached the upright ship.

Martin held out his hand. "Take it easy, Lindell. See you in six months."

"Right enough. Give old man Wentner a kick in the pants for me."

"Will do."

He watched the co-pilot dwindle in size, ascending the metal ladder to the hatchway. A midget Martin pulled himself into the ship and clanged the metal port shut. Lindell waved back at the tiny figure at the port and then turned and walked away to escape the blast.

He stood on a hill underneath the heavy scarlet foliage of a tree. Inside the ship's belly there was a liquid cough, a rush of exploding gases. He watched the ship hang for a moment on its flaming exhaust and then flash up into the green-blue sky, leaving scorched ground in its wake. The next instant it was gone.

He walked in lazy strides back toward the house, gazing appreciatively at the profusion of livid plants and flowers in the meadow around him, bulbous insects hanging over them.

He took off his jacket and let it hang from one hand as he walked. The sun felt good on his lean back.

"Boys," he said to the fragrant air, "you're all wet."

THE great blazing sun was almost gone, spraying the sky red with the blood of its cyclic dying. Soon the three moons would rise — guaranteed to drive insane a man looking for a shadow he could call his own.

Lindell sat at the living room window, gazing out over the countryside. *You couldn't beat it,* he thought; *for air or climate or all the things that grew in Earth-paling technicolor. Nature outdid herself in this tucked-away corner of the Galaxy.*

He sighed and stretched, wondering about supper.

Drink?

He started, chopping a yawn in half, and drew his fingers together so fast that the knuckle bones crackled.

He saw her standing at his side offering a tray with a glass

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on it. He reached for it, feeling his heart placate itself after the initial jolt.

"I'd knock or something," he suggested.

The big eyes were elliptical now. They stared at him without comprehension.

"Well, let it go," he said, after a sip of the warm, tangy liquid. He smacked his lips and took another sip, a long one.

"Damn good," he said. "Thanks, Lover."

He blinked at himself. *That brings a guy up short,* he decided. *Lover? Of all the unlikely names in the Universe. . . .*

He glanced at her with a chuckle bubbling up in his throat.

She hadn't moved. Her face was screwed up into what he assumed was a smile. But her mouth wasn't designed for smiling.

"Hey, when are we eating?" he asked, feeling an edge uncomfortable under the unmoving gaze of her watery eye globes.

She turned and hurried to the door.

There she turned.

All ready already, he got the the message.

He grinned, downed the drink, got up and followed her eager shuffle down the dim hallway.

Some time later he pushed away the plate with a sigh and leaned back in the chair.

"That's what I call good," he said.

Like a hidden spring, he felt her pleasure well up in his mind. *Lover thanks you.*

She certainly picked up the name fast, he thought.

She looked at him, eyes wide.

Was she trying to smile again? he wondered. To him the expression looked like all her others — the facial poses of an idiot. He thought she was smiling, though, because of the thoughts that accompanied the expression.

Then he found his eyes involuntarily watering in empathy and he turned his head, blinking. A trifle nervously, he dumped a teaspoon of sugar in his coffee and stirred. He could still feel her gaze on him. A twinge of displeasure marred his thoughts and she turned away abruptly. *That's better,* he thought, and felt all right again.

"Hey, tell me, Lover," he started to say. *Well, might as well get used to it,* he figured.

You have a husband?

Her returned thoughts were confused.

A mate? he re-worded.

Oh, yes.

In the worker's village?

They have no mates, she said, and he thought he sensed a note of hauteur in her reply.

He shrugged and took a sip of coffee. "Well," he said, "one sat-

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isfied worker would drive the rest of 'em crazy anyway. They'd be biting their nails if they have nails. And on that note — good night."

In bed he sat writing in his much-used diary. Between its battered covers were inscribed the sparse comments he had made on half a dozen different planets. This was his seventh station.

"My lucky number," he paragraphed in blue ink.

Again no sound. *To sleep?* His pen skiddled and spat out three fat blots. He looked up and saw her with the tray again.

"Yeah," he said. *Yeah. Thanks, Lover. But, look, will you just let me know when you. . . .* He stopped, seeing that it was hopeless.

"This will make me sleep?" he asked.

Oh, yes, was the reply.

He took a sip, looking down at the ink-blotted page. *Just started it anyway,* he thought; *no loss of priceless literature.* He ripped out the page and crumpled it in one hand.

"This is good stuff," he said, nodding his head toward the glass. He held up the paper.

Throw it away, hah? Throw away? she asked.

"That's right," he said. "Now clear out. What in hell are you doing in a man's boudoir anyway?"

She scuttled across the floor and he grinned as she closed the door quietly behind herself.

Finishing the drink, he set it down on the bedside table and turned off the lamp. He settled back on the soft pillow with a sigh. Critical, he thought in drowsy satisfaction. *Nuts.*

Good night.

He opened his heavy-lidded eyes and looked around. There was no one in the room. He sank back.

Good night.

He raised up on one elbow, squinting into the darkness.

Good night.

"Oh," he said. "Good night, yourself." The thoughts abated. He fell back again and made his mouth a tooth-edged cave with yawning.

"How about that?" he muttered thickly, turning on his side. "Absolutely no mirrors. See? Nothin' up my sleeves. Howboutha. . . ."

He had a dream. The dream covered him with sweat.

AFTER breakfast, he left the house with her farewells tugging at his brain, and headed across the grounds for the warehouse. Already, he saw, the Gnee men were formed in a moving line, carrying bundles on their heads. They marched into the warehouse, deposited their bur-

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den on the concrete and had it checked off by a Gnee foreman who stood in the center of the floor, holding a clipboard thick with paper-thin vouchers.

As Lindell approached, the men all bowed and looked more cowed as they hastened on their rounds. He noticed that their heads were flatter than Lover's, a little more darkly tinted, and with smaller eyes. Their bodies were broad and thick-muscled.

They do look stupid, he thought.

As he came up to the man who was doing the checking and sent out an unanswered thought, he saw that they weren't telepathic either. Or maybe didn't want to be.

"How doody," said the man in a squeaky voice. "I check. You check?"

"That's okay," Lindell said, pushing back the clipboard. "Just bring it into the office when the first batch is all in."

"What, hah?" said the man.

Jeez, are you a case, Lindell thought. "Bring this," he said, tapping the clipped sheaf of papers, "Bring to office." He pointed again. "Bring to me . . . me! When goods are all in."

The man's splotchy face lit up with a look of eager stupidity and he nodded brightly. Lindell patted his shoulder. Good boy, rasped his mind. I bet you're dynamite in a crisis.

He headed for the office, gritting his teeth.

Inside, he shut the plastiglass door behind him and looked around the office. It was all the same as he remembered from other stations, except for the cot in one corner.

Don't tell me I have to sleep out here nights, he thought with a groan.

He moved closer. On the flat soil-cased pillow was the imprint of a head. He picked up a light brown hair. *And what in the hell is this?* he wondered. Under the cot he found a belt without a buckle. On the wall by the cot there were violent scratches, as though a man in fever had tried to get out of the office the hard way. He stared at them.

The joint is haunted, he concluded with a vague shake of his head. Then he turned away with a shrug. *No use worrying myself,* he thought. *I got six months to go and nothing's going to get me down.*

He sat down quickly before the desk and dragged the heavy station log before himself. He flipped open the heavy cover and started reading from the beginning.

The first entries were twenty years dry. They were signed Jefferson Winters or, a little later, a hasty Jeff. At the end of six months and fifty-two closely

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packed pages, Lindell found page 53 covered with a floridly penned message, "Station Four, good-by forever!" Jeff didn't seem to have had any difficulties adjusting to the life there.

Lindell shifted back in the creaking chair and pulled the heavy book on his lap with a sigh of boredom.

It was after the first replacement's second month that the entries started to get ragged. There were blurred words, hurried scrawling, mistakes deleted and re-done. Some of the errors apparently had been corrected much later by still another replacement.

It was that way through the next four hundred or so sleep-inducing pages; a sorry chain of flaws and eventual correction. Lindell flipped through them wearily without the slightest interest in their content.

Then he reached the entries signed Bill Corrigan and, with a blinking yawn, he straightened himself up, propped the book on the desk and paid closer attention.

They were the same as in every case before, excluding the first one — efficient beginnings declining markedly to increased wildness, the penmanship erring more extravagantly with each month until, at last, it became almost illegible. He found a few blatantly miscalculated additions which he corrected in his careful hand.

Corrigan's writing, he noted, broke off in the middle of a word one afternoon. And for the last month and a half of Corrigan's stay, there were nothing but blank pages. He thumbed through them carelessly, shaking his head slowly.

Have to admit it, he thought. *I don't get it.*

SITTING in the living room through twilight and, later, at supper, he began to get the sensation that Lover's thoughts were somehow alive, like microscopic insects crawling in and out among the fissures of his brain. Sometimes they barely moved; other times they leaped excitedly. Once, when he became a little irritated with her staring, the thoughts were like invisible suppliants pawing weepily at his mind.

What was worse, he realized while reading in bed, the sensation occurred even when she wasn't in the same room with him. It was disconcerting enough to feel an endless stream of thoughts flowing into him while she was close; this remote control business was just a little too much for his taste.

Hey, how about it? he tried to reason her away good-naturedly.

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But all he got back was the picture of her looking at him wide-eyed and uncomprehending.

"Ah, nuts," he muttered and tossed his book on the bedside table. *Maybe that's it,* he thought, settling down for the night; *this telepathy gimick. Maybe that was what got the other men. Well, not me,* he vowed. *I just won't worry myself about it.* And he turned out the lamp, said good night to the air and went to sleep.

"Sleep," he muttered, unaware, only partly conscious. It wasn't sleep. Not deep enough by half. A cloudy haze submerged his mind and filled it with the same detailed scene. It telescoped and sank away in a burst. It magnified, welling up and swallowing him and everything.

Lover. Lover. The echo of a shriek in a long black corridor. The robe fluttering close by. He saw her pale features. "No," he said, "stay away. Far, close, beyond, upon." He cried out. "No. *No.* NO!"

He jolted up in the darkness with a choking grunt, eyes full open. He stared groggily around the empty bedroom, his thoughts broiling.

He reached out in the darkness and flicked on the lamp. Hurriedly, he stuck a cigarette between his lips and lay slumped against the headboard, blowing out clouds of curling smoke. He raised his hand and saw that it shook. He muttered words without sense.

Then his nostrils twitched and his lips drew back in revulsion. What the hell died? he thought. There was a heavy saccharine odor in the air, getting worse every second. He tossed off the covers.

At the foot of the bed he found them—a thick pile of livid purple flowers arranged as an offering.

He looked at them a moment and then bent over to pick them up and throw them away. He drew back, gasping, as a thorn punctured his right thumb.

He pressed out bright blood drops and sucked the wound, his brain assailed by the thickening smell of the ugly blooms.

IT'S very nice of you, he sent her the message, *but no more flowers.*

She looked at him. She doesn't get it, he knew.

"Do you understand?" he asked.

Floods of affection gurgled over the layers of his brain like syrup. He stirred his coffee restlessly and the transfer eased as though she were determined not to offend him. The kitchen was silent except for the clink of his silver on the breakfast dishes and the slight

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whispering rustle of her robe.

He gulped down coffee and stood up to leave.

I'll eat lunch around . . .

I know. Her thought cut into his, mildly commanding. He grinned a little to himself as he headed down the hall. Her telepathed message had come with an almost motherlike chiding.

Then, crossing the grounds, he recalled the dream again and the departing grin emptied his features of amusement.

All morning he wondered irritably what made the Gnee men so stupid. If they dropped a bundle, it was a project to pick it up again. *They're like brainless cows,* he thought, watching them through the office windows as they plodded through their tasks, eyes dull and unblinking, their thick shoulders sloping inward.

He knew definitely now that they weren't telepathic. He'd tried several times to give them orders with his mind alone and there was no receipt of message. They reacted only to loudly repeated words of two syllables or, preferably, less. And they reacted moronically at that.

In the middle of the morning he looked up from the backlog of paper work that Corrigan had left and realized, with some shock, that her thoughts were reaching him all the way from the house.

And yet they weren't thoughts he could translate into words. They were just sensations, amorphously present. He got the feeling that she was checking, sending out exploratory beams now and again to see if all was well with him.

The first few times it did no more than amuse him; he chuckled softly and went back to his work.

But then the proddings assumed an annoyingly regular time pattern and he began to squirm in his chair. He found himself becoming rigidly erect and anticipating them seconds before they came.

By late morning he was repulsing them consciously, tossing his pen on the desk and ordering her angrily to leave him alone when he worked. Her thoughts would break off contritely—and soon come back again, like creeping things that stole upon him, insinuating and beyond insult.

His nerves began to fray a little. He left the office and prowled the warehouse floor, tearing open bundles and checking goods with impatient fingers. The thoughts followed him around faithfully.

"How doody," said the Gnee foreman every time Lindell passed, making him angrier yet.

Once he straightened up suddenly over a bundle and said

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loudly, "Go away!"

The foreman jumped a foot in the air. His pencil and clipboard went flying, and he hid behind a pillar and looked fearfully at Lindell.

Lindell pretended not to notice.

LATER, back in the office, he sat thinking, the open log book before him.

No wonder the Gnee men didn't telepath, he thought. They knew what was good for them.

Then he looked out the window at the plodding line of workers.

What if they weren't just *avoiding* telepathy? What if they were incapable of it; had once held the ability and, because of it, had been broken to their present state of witless stolidity?

He thought of what Martin had said about the women outnumbering the men. And a phrase entered his brain—matriarchy by mind. The phrase offended him, but he was suddenly afraid that it might be true. It *would* explain why the other men had cracked. For if the women were in control, it might well be that, in their inherent lust for dominance, they made no distinction between their own men and the men from Earth. A man is a man is a man. He twisted angrily at the idea of possibly being considered on a level with the dolts who lived in the village.

He stood up abruptly. *I'm not hungry,* he thought, *not at all. But I'm going back to the house and order her to make me lunch and let her know I'm not hungry either. I'll make her used to being dominated herself and then she'll get no chance to pick at me. No bug-eyed female Gnee, by God, is going to get me down!*

Then he blinked and turned away quickly when he realized that he was staring at the wild pattern of scratches on the far office wall, and the belt without a buckle that still curled limply underneath the cot.

THE dream again. It tore at his brain tissues with claws of razor. Sweat covering him, he tossed on the bed with a groan and was suddenly awake, staring into the darkness.

He thought he saw something at the foot of the bed. He closed his eyes and shook his head and looked again. The room was empty. He felt mind-drenching thoughts recede like some alien fog.

His fists contracted angrily. *She's been at me while I slept,* he thought. *Goddam her hide, she's been at me.*

He pushed back the covers and crawled to the foot of the bed nervously.

He couldn't see them, but the cloying fumes undulated up from

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the floor like erected serpents slithering into his nostrils. Gagging, he slumped down on the mattress, his stomach wrenched.

Why? His brain mumbled over and over. *My God, why?*

Angrily, he threw the flowers away in her sight and the thoughts pleaded and showered over him like raindrops.

"I said no, didn't I?" he yelled at her.

Then he sat down at the table and controlled himself as well as he could. *I've got a long way to go,* he told his will. *Ease off, ease off.*

Now he was sure he knew why it was only six months; that would be more than enough. *But I won't crack,* he commanded himself. *It's a cinch she isn't going to crack, so conserve yourself. She's too stupid to crack,* he thought deliberately, hoping she'd pick it up.

She apparently did, for her shoulders slumped dejectedly all at once. And, during breakfast, she circled him like a timorous wraith, keeping her face averted and her thoughts aloof. He found himself almost sorry for her then. It probably wasn't her fault. It was just an inborn trait among the Gnee women.

Then he realized that her thoughts were at him again, tender and gratefully maudlin. He tried to neutralize himself and ignore them as they sought to break through his apathy like honeyed picks.

All day he worked hard and made payments in spices and grain to the Gnee foreman. He wondered if the payments would go eventually to the women—wherever they were.

"I'm taping my voice," he dictated later that night. "I want to hear myself talking so I can forget her. There's no one else here to talk to; I have to talk to myself. A sad case. Well, here goes.

"Here I am on Station Four, folks, having a wonderful time and wish you were here instead of me. Oh, it's not *that* bad. Don't get me wrong. But I guess I know what knocked out Corrigan and the poor bastards before him. It was Lover and her cannibal mind eating them up. But I'll tell you this, cousins; it's not going to eat me up. That much you can put bets on. Lover isn't going to . . .

"No, I didn't call you! Come on, get out of my life, will you? Go to a movie or something. Yeah, yeah, I know. Well, go to bed then. Just leave me alone.

Alone.

"There. That for her. She'll have to go some to get me clawing at the wallpaper."

But he carefully locked the door to his room when he went

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to bed. And he groaned in his sleep because of the same nightmare and his limbs thrashed and all peace and rest were crowded out.

He twisted into wakefulness in mid-morning and stumbled up to check the door. He fumbled at the lock with heavy fingers. Finally his thickened centers divined the fact that the door was still locked and he went back to bed in a weaving line and fell on it into a stupored sleep.

When he woke up in the morning, there were flowers at the foot of his bed, luxuriantly purple and foul-smelling.

The door was still locked.

HE couldn't ask her about it because he left the kitchen in revulsion when she called him *dear.*

No more flowers. I promise, cried her pursuing thoughts. He locked himself in the living room and sat at the desk, feeling sick. *Get hold of yourself!* he ordered his system, clasping his hands tightly and holding his teeth firmly clenched.

Eat? She was outside the door; he knew it.

He closed his eyes. *Go away, leave me alone,* he told her.

I'm sorry, dear, she said.

"Stop calling me dear!" he shouted, slamming his fist on the desk surface. As he twisted in the chair, his belt buckle caught on the drawer handle and it jerked out. He found himself staring down at the shiny gas pistol. Almost unconsciously he reached down and touched its slick barrel.

He shoved in the drawer with a convulsive movement. None of that!

He looked around suddenly, feeling alone and free. He got up and hurried to the window. Down below, he saw her hurrying across the grounds with a basket on her arm. *She's going for vegetables,* he thought. *But what made her leave so suddenly?*

Of course. The pistol. She must have gotten his thoughts of violent intent.

He sighed and calmed down a little. *I've still got cards in my hand,* he soothed himself.

While she was out, he decided to look in her room and see if he could find the shifting panel that enabled her to enter his room with the flowers. He hurried down the hall and pushed open the door to her barely furnished little chamber.

His brain was immediately attacked by the odor of a reeking pile of the purple flowers in one corner. He held a hand over his mouth and nose as he looked down in distaste at the living and dead blossoms.

What did they represent? An offering of thoughtfulness? His

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throat contracted. Or was it more than thoughtfulness? He grimaced at the thought and remembered that first evening when he'd dubbed her Lover. What had possessed him to choose that name from the infinity of possible names? He hoped he didn't know. He hoped he'd never know.

On her couch he found a small pile of odds and ends. There was a button, a pair of broken shoe laces, the piece of crumpled paper he had told her to throw away. And a belt buckle with the initials W. C. stamped on it.

There were no secret panels.

He sat in the kitchen staring into an untouched cup of coffee. No way she could get in his room. W. C.—William Corrigan. He had to fight it, keep fighting it.

Time passed. Suddenly he realized that she was back in the house again. There was no sound; it was like the return of a ghost. But he knew it. A cloud of feeling preceded her, came plunging through the rooms like an excited puppy searching. Thoughts swirled.

You are well? You are not angry? Lover is back—all hastily and eagerly clutching at him.

She swept into the room so quickly that his hands twitched and he upset the cup. The hot liquid splashed over his shirt and trousers as he jumped back, knocking over the chair.

She put down the basket and got a towel. He stood there, lips drained of color as she patted the stains dry. She'd never been so close to him. She'd never actually touched him before except for that first revolting handshake.

There was an aroma about her; it made his chest heave painfully. And all the time, her thoughts caressed his mind as her hands seemed to be caressing his body.

There, there. I am here with you, David dear.

Almost in horror, he stared at her spongy pink skin, her huge eyes, her tiny wound of a mouth.

And, in the office that morning, he made three straight mistakes in the log book and tore out the whole page and hurled it across the room with a choking cry of rage.

AVOID her. No point in arguing or threatening. He tried to raze his mental ground so that her thoughts could not find domicile there. If he relaxed his mind enough, her thoughts flowed through and out, perhaps taking part of his will as they left, but he had to risk that.

And if he worked hard and crowded his head with stodgy banks of figures, it kept her at a distance and his hands did not tremble so badly.

Maybe I should sleep in the

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office, he thought.

Then he found Corrigan's note. It was on a slip of paper stuck away in the log book, hidden white on white. He only found it because he was going through the pages one at a time, reciting the dates in a loud voice to keep his mind filled.

"God help me," read the note, black and jagged-lettered. "Lover comes through the walls!"

Lindell stared.

"I saw it myself," attested the words. "I'm going out of my mind. Always that damn animal mind tugging and tearing at me. And now I can't even shut away her body. I slept out here, but she came anyway."

Lindell read it again and it was a wind fanning the fires of terror. Through the walls. The words agonized him. Was it possible?

It was Corrigan, then, who had named her Lover. From the very start, the relationship had been on her terms. Lindell had had nothing to say about it.

"Lover," he muttered, and her thoughts enveloped him suddenly like a bat's wings swooping down from the sky. He flung up his arms and cried out, "Leave me alone!"

And, as her phantom mind slipped off, he had the sense that it was with less timidity, with the patience such as a man knowing his own great strength can afford to display.

He sank back on the chair, exhausted suddenly, depleted with fighting it. He crumpled the note in his right hand, thinking of the scratches on the wall behind him. And he saw in his mind Corrigan tossing on the cot, burning with fever, rearing up with a shriek of horror to see her standing before him.

But then? The scene was dark.

He rubbed a shaking hand over his face. *Don't crack,* he said to himself. But it was more a frightened entreaty than a command. Wasting fogs of premonition flooded over him in chilling waves.

She comes through the walls.

That night again, he poured down the bathroom sink the potion she had made. He locked the door and, in the lightless room, he squatted in one corner, peering and waiting, lungs bellowing only because he forced himself to remember to breathe.

The thermostat lowered the heat. The floorboards got icy and his teeth started chattering. *I'm not going to bed,* he vowed angrily. He didn't know why it was suddenly the bed that frightened him. *I don't know,* he forced the words through his brain, because he felt vaguely, that he did know and he didn't want to admit it, even for a second.

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But, after hours of futile waiting, he had to straighten up with a snapping of joints and stumble back to bed. There he crawled under the blankets and lay trembling, trying to stay awake.

She'll come while I'm asleep, he thought.

I mustn't sleep.

When he woke up in the morning, there were flowers on the floor for him. And that was another day before a mass of days that sank crushed into the lump of months.

YOU can get used to horror, he thought, *when it has lost immediacy and is no longer pungent and has become a steady diet. When it has degraded to a chain of mind-numbing events. When shocks are like scalpels picking and jabbing at delicate ganglia until they have lost all feeling.*

Yet, though it was no longer terror, it was worse. For his nerves were raw and bleeding a hemophilia of rage. He fought his battles to the dregs of seconds, gaunt-willed, shouting her off, firing lances of hate from his despairing mind, tortured by her surrenders that were her victories. She always came back; like an enraging cat, rubbing endless sycophantic sides against him, filling him with thoughts of . . . *yes, admit it!* he screamed to himself through midnight struggles.

Thoughts of *love.*

And there was the undercurrent, the promise of new shock that would topple his already shaking edifice. It needed only that; an added push, another stab of the blade, one more drop of the shattering hammer.

The shapeless threat hung over him. He waited for it, poised for it a hundred times an hour, especially at night. Wait. Waiting. And sometimes, when he thought he knew what it was he was waiting for, the shock of admission made him shudder and made him want to claw at walls and break things and run until the blackness swallowed him.

If he could only forget her for a while, just a little while, it would be all right. He mumbled it to himself as he set up the movie projector.

She begged from the kitchen, *Can I see?*

"No!"

Now all his replies, worded or thought, were like the snapping retorts of a jangled old man. If only the six months would end. That was the problem. The months were not moving fast enough. And time was like her—not to be reasoned with or intimidated.

There were many reels of film on the wall shelf, but his hand

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reached up without hesitation and picked out one. He didn't notice it; his mind was calloused to suggestion. He adjusted the reel on the spindle and turned out the lights. He sat down with a tired groan as the flickering milky light cone shot out from the lens, throwing pictures on the screen.

A lean dark-bearded man was posing, arms crossed, white teeth showing in an artificial smile. He came closer to the camera. The sun flashed, blurring the film a second. Black screen. Title: "Picture of Me."

The man, high-cheekboned, bright-eyed, stood laughing soundlessly out from the screen. He pointed to his side and the camera swung around. Lindell sat up sharply.

It was the station.

Apparently it was fall, for, as the camera swept past the house, the village, jerking a moment as though changing hands, he saw the trees surrounded by heaps of dead leaves. He sat there shivering, waiting for something, he didn't know what.

The screen blacked. Another title roughly etched in white. "Jeff in the Office."

The man peered at the camera, an idiotic smile on his face. White skin accentuated by the immaculate black outline of his beard.

Fadeout, in. The man doing a jig around the empty warehouse floor, hands poised delicately in the air, his dark hair bouncing wildly on his skull.

Another title flashing on the screen. Lindell stiffened in his seat, his breath cut off abruptly.

"Lover."

THERE was her face, horribly repellent in black and white. She was standing by his bedroom window, her face a mask of delight. He could tell it was delight now. Once he would have said she looked like a maniac, her mouth twisted like a living scar, her grotesque eyes staring.

She spun and her robe swirled out. He saw her puffy ankles and his stomach muscles grew rock taut.

She approached the camera. He saw filmy eyelids slide down over her eyes. His hands began to tremble violently. It was his dream. It made him sick. It was his dream to the detail. Then it had never been a dream; not from his own mind.

A sob tore at his throat. She was undoing the robe. *Here it is!* gibbered his mind in a panic. He whimpered and reached out shakily to turn off the projector.

No! It was a cold command in the darkness. *Watch me,* she ordered.

He sat bound in a vise of terror, staring in sick fascination as

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the robe slid from her neck, pulled down over her round shoulders. She twisted sensuously. The robe sank into a heavy swirling heap on the floor.

He screamed, flung out an arm that swept into the burning projector. It crashed down on the floor. The room was night. He struggled up and lurched across the room.

Nice? Nice? The word dug at him mercilessly as he fumbled for the door.

He found it, rushed into the hall. Her door opened and she stood in the half light, the robe hanging from one spongy shoulder.

He jolted to a halt. "Get out of here!" he yelled.

No.

He made a convulsive move for her, hands out like rigid claws. The sight of her pink, moist flesh spun him away.

Yes? her mind suggested. It seemed as if he heard it spoken in a sly rising voice.

"Listen!" he cried, reaching out for the door to his room. "Listen, you have to go, do you understand? Go to your mate."

He twisted back in utter horror.

I am with him now, her message had said.

The thought paralyzed him. He stared, open-mouthed, heart pounding in slow, gigantic beats as the robe slipped over her shoulders and started down her arms.

He whirled with a cry and slammed the door behind him. His fingers shook on the lock. Her thoughts were a wailing in his mind. He shook in fright and sickness and knew it was no good because he couldn't lock her out.

THERE were monkeys chattering in his brain. They lay on their backs in a circle and kicked at the inside of his skull. They grabbed juicy blobs of gray in their dirty paws and they squeezed.

He rolled on his side with a groan. *I'll go crazy,* he said. *Like Corrigan, like all of them but the first one—that slimy one who started it all; who added a new and hideous warp to the corrugation of her dominating mind—who had named her Lover because he meant it.*

Suddenly he sat up with a gasp of terror, staring at the foot of the bed: *She comes through the walls,* howled his brain. Nothing there, his eyes saw. His fingers clutched at the sheets. He felt sweat dripping off his brow and rolling down the embankment of his nose.

He lay back. Up again! He whimpered like a frightened child. A cloud of blackness was falling over him. He groaned, "No," in the blackness.

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No use.

He whined. *Sleep. Sleep.* The word throbbed, swelled and depressed in his brain. This was the time. He knew it, knew it, knew . . .

The blade falling, sanity decapitated and twitching bloody in the basket.

No!

He tried to push himself up, but he couldn't. *Sleep.* A black tide of night hovering, tracking. *Sleep.*

He fell on the pillow, pushed up weakly on one elbow.

"No." His lungs were crusted. "No."

He struggled. It was too much. He screamed a thick bubbling scream. She threw his will aside, snapped and futile. She was using all her strength now and he was de-enervated, beaten. He thudded back on the pillow, glassy-eyed and limp. He moaned weakly and his eyes shut, opened, shut, opened, shut . . .

The dream again. Insane. Not a dream.

When he woke up, there were no flowers. The courtship was ended. He gaped blankly and unbelievingly at the imprint of a body beside him on the bed.

It was still warm and moist.

HE laughed out loud. He wrote curse words in his diary. He wrote them in tall black letters, holding the pencil like a knife. He wrote them in the log book too. He tore up vouchers if they were not the right color. His entries were crooked, lines of figures like wavy-numbered tendrils. Sometimes he didn't care about that. Mostly he didn't notice.

He prowled the filled warehouse behind locked doors, red-eyed and muttering. He clambered up on the bundles and stared out through the skylight at the empty sky. He was lighter by fifteen pounds, unwashed. His face was black with wiry growth. He was going to have an immaculate beard. She wanted it. She didn't want him to wash or shave or be healthy. She called him Jeff dear.

You can't fight that, he told himself. *You can't win because you lose. If you advance you are retreating because, when you are too tired to fight, she comes back and she takes your body and your soul.*

That was why he whispered to the warehouse so no one would hear, "There is a thing to do."

And that was why, at night, he sneaked to the living room and put the gas pistol in his pocket. Never harm the Gnees. Well, that was wrong. It was kill or be killed.

That's why I'm taking the pistol to bed with me. That's why I'm stroking it as I stare up at

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the ceiling. Yes, this is it. This is my rock to rest on through the day-nights.

And he turned over plans as an animal snuffles over flat stones to find bugs for supper.

Days. Days. Days.

He whispered, "Kill her."

He nodded and smiled to himself and patted the cool metal.

"You're my friend," he said. "You're my only friend. She has to die. We all know that."

He made lots of plans and they were all the same one. He killed her a million times in his mind, in secret chambers of his mind that he had discovered and opened; where he could crouch clever and undisturbed while he made his plans.

He walked and looked at the worker's village.

Animals. I'm not going to end up like you. I'm not going to I'm not going to and when I do I'm not I am . . .

LINDELL lurched up from his office desk, eyes wide, slaver running over his lips. He held the pistol tight in his palsied hand.

He flung open the office door and staggered over the concrete, through the lanes between roof-high stacks. His mouth was so tight that his clamped jaws hurt. He held the pistol pointing.

He kicked up the catch and dragged back one heavy door. He plunged out into the hot sunlight and broke into a run. Wisps of terror licked out from the house. He thought of murder with harder, more savage joy. He ran faster. He fell down because his legs had no feeling. The pistol went flying. He crawled to it and tenderly brushed off the dust.

He stood up dizzily and started to hobble. He was hearing things —not Lover's thoughts, for once.

He looked up and blinked and knew he was going insane . . .

It was a cargo ship. The cargo ship. Only, of course, it couldn't be.

He dropped the pistol and slumped down beside it, plucking at blue grass with an idiot intensity that he knew was like the Gnee men's. He was careful not to watch the ship as it seemed to come down and the hatches made an impossibly convincing clang and men appeared to climb out.

"Go away," he said to the illusion of a man standing beside him. "You're not here. The six months aren't over."

His voice was quite normal, except that it broke into giggles and sobs while he had a fist fight with the air.

"You'll be all right," the man apparently said, and he felt something that might have been an insect bite, though he thought it was the man pricking him with a

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hypo of sedative.

Two other men came with a stretcher and a sheet that they wrapped him tightly in, and they began carrying him, shrieking and battling, toward the mirage ship.

"You can't take me away!" he shouted. "I've got to kill Lover first!"

"It wouldn't do any good," the first man said. "There are a lot more where she came from—one at a time for every guy we station here, it looks like."

"She comes through the walls!" Lindell screamed.

"That's what you get to believe," said the man soothingly. "It must be pretty fierce. But that's all over now. You're going back home."

Lindell tried to fight free of the sheet. "Let me at least warn the next guy!"

"It wouldn't do any good. He wouldn't believe you. That's why you didn't see us take away the poor character you relieved."

And then the sedative took hold and Lindell fell asleep. The dreams came, but with them was the sound of rockets blasting off, and the spongy image of the Gnee woman grew smaller and smaller and less frightful.

But he still smelled the livid flowers. He knew he always would.

—RICHARD MATHESON

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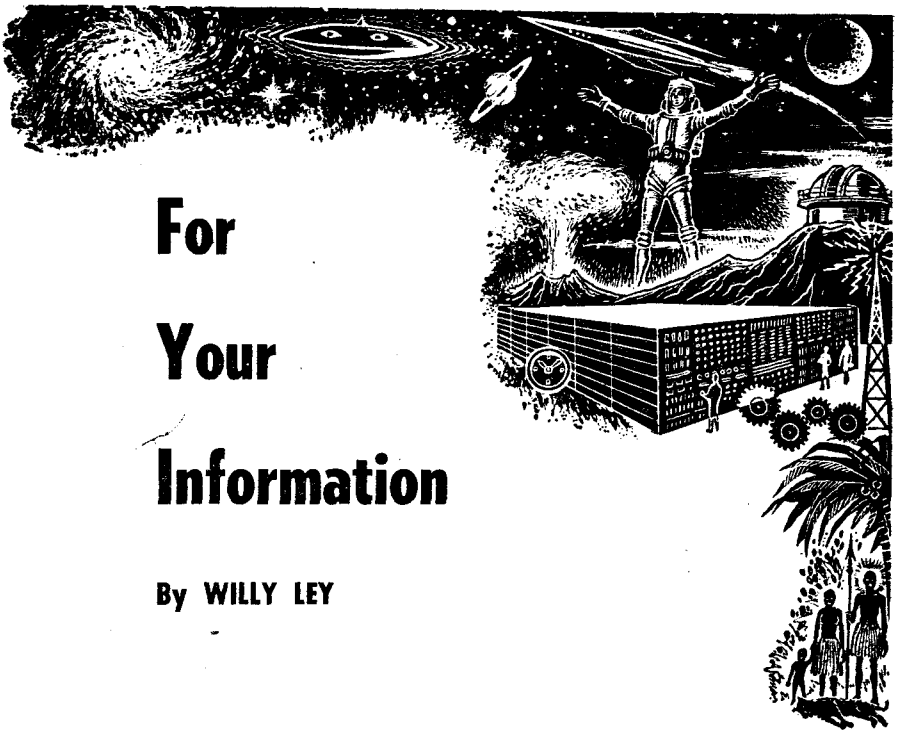

For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

THIS month I am going to devote the main section of this department to a chart of the chemical elements. Well, it won't really be a "chart" because I don't intend to waste space in GALAXY for something that can be looked up in any chemistry textbook. Hence isotopes, whether natural or artificial, will not be mentioned, and not a line will be wasted on melting or boiling points, nor will there be chemical information or

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electrical characteristics. All that can be found in textbooks and handbooks. What I am concerned with—and it took a good deal of time to get this information together—will be of no use to chemists or engineers. But it will, I hope, be interesting. I want to write about the names of the elements, what they mean and why their discoverers proposed them.

Element No. 1 is, of course, hydrogen. Nicolas Lémery of France discovered it around 1700 and suspected that water was one of its compounds. The other component of water, oxygen, element No. 16, was discovered by Joseph Priestly of England and Karl Wilhelm Scheele of Sweden some 75 years later and when it was established that elements 1 and 16 made water (at first thought to be HO) the names were tagged on. *Hydor,* a Greek word, means water, hence hydrogen, meaning "water-former." The other component of water seemed to be in every acid, hence the name oxygen, "acid-former."

Now we know that there are acids without oxygen, but none without hydrogen. And since the oxygen atom is much heavier than the hydrogen atom, there is far more oxygen in water than hydrogen, even though the formula is H_2O. In short, element No. 1 *should* be called oxygen and No. 16 *should* be hydrogen. But it's a little late to change them around now.

Element No. 2 is helium, from *Helios,* the Greek sun god, for the reason that it was found in the solar atmosphere first (by Jules Janssen of France in 1868) before Sir William Ramsey discovered it in the Earth's atmosphere (1895). No. 3 was named by its discoverer, Swede Johan A. Arfwedson of Sweden (1817), without noticeable thought or imagination. *Lithos* is Greek for "stone," the ore it came from looked like stone, hence lithium. No. 4 also got its name from the mineral in which it occurs. It happens to be green and in Latin there is a word *beryllinus* which means green-colored, so the element was called beryllium. Similarly, the name of No. 9 was derived from one of its minerals. The mineral was used—and still is—as a flux in metallurgical operations. German miners, consequently, called the mineral *Fluss-spat,* which became fluorspar by adaptation of the Latin word *fluere,* "to flow." Fluorspar is the fluoride of calcium and the element was called fluorine. There happens to be a minor and accidental justification for the name: it "flows out" of almost anything you try to keep it in.

No. 10, neon, means " the new" because it obviously was new

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when Sir William Ramsay discovered it in 1898. But No. 11 is less obvious. You may have wondered why the chemical symbol for sodium is Na. The common English name is derived from soda, but the symbol is derived from the word *Natrium,* which was both common and mysterious until somebody found out that that the original is an Arabic word *neter,* meaning "herb-ash," as distinct from *kalyun,* "wood-ash," and accounts for the letter K as the symbol for No. 19.

That K stands for the international name *kalium,* but the English name was derived from pot ash, making it potassium. Both were first isolated in 1808 by Sir Humphry Davy, who isolated No. 12, magnesium, at the same time. That name is from the mineral magnesia, which was named in turn after an ancient city. Similarly aluminum, No. 13, was named after its mineral, alum, while No. 14, silicon, got its name from *silex,* which in this case is not the trade mark of a coffee maker, but the Latin word for flint.

No. 15, phosphorus, has a Greek name which is meaningful and fitting; it translates as "carrier of light." The knowledge of No. 16, sulphur, however, is so old that the meaning of its name is no longer remembered. Since No. 17, chlorine, is a greenish gas, its discoverer, Karl Wilhelm Scheele, just used the Greek word for "green" (*chloros*) to name it. Sir William Ramsay utilized the Greek word for "sluggish" to name No. 18, argon, because it did not want to combine with anything else. No. 20, calcium, one of Sir Humphry Davy's discoveries, derives its name from the Latin *calx,* "burned lime."

When Lars Nilson discovered No. 21 in 1879, he called it scandium, after Scandinavia, but his compatriot Baron Jöns Jakob Berzelius, discoverer, among other things, of No. 22, titanium, had to justify his choice with the excuse that, in Greek mythology, the titans were the "sons of the Earth." No. 23, vanadium, was discovered and named by Nils Sefström of Sweden in 1830. He derived it from the Germanic goddess Vanadis, better known as Freya, for no reason except that he apparently liked the sound.

No. 24, chromium, is from *chromos,* the Greek word for "color" or "dye"; you know what a pronounced color chromium-yellow has. But No. 25, manganese, is a puzzle. Nobody seems to know the derivation of the word, except that one commentator remarked that the mineral from which manganese is derived was wrongly called "black magnesia" for a while. Since *melas*

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is Greek for black, I could understand the connection if the element were called melanganese. Maybe it was at one time, but I have yet to find proof.

In the case of No. 26, iron, we have one of the few elements which have been known for so long that their names have no derivation. The chemical symbol FE comes from the Latin *ferrum* and the Greek equivalent *sideros* can be encountered as siderite, indicating an iron meteorite.

Cobalt and nickel, Nos. 27 and 28, are both German, the former meaning gnome (*Kobold*), the latter meaning water sprite. The nasty creatures fooled the brave miners, handing them ores that looked like silver ore, but were completely worthless, since applied metallurgy had not yet progressed to the extraction of the metals. They were discovered, for the record, by two Swedes, cobalt by Georg Brandt in 1735 and nickel by Axel Cronstedt in 1754.

No. 29, copper, although known since antiquity, has a name that is still traceable. The chemical symbol Cu is from the Latin name *cuprum*, and *cuprum* is in all probability derived from the island of Cyprus, which was pronounced "keeprus."

No. 30, zinc, is German again, from the word *Zinke*, which means protrusion because it sublimed in the furnace and condensed in protrusions in the cooler parts. Nos. 31 and 32 are Gallium and Germanium; the two discoverers, Lecoq de Boisbaudran (1875) and Klemens Winkler (1886), honored their respective countries. No. 33 is arsenic, said to have been isolated first by Albertus Magnus. The name, at any event, is Greek; *arsén* means "strong" or "masculine."

Selenium, No. 34, is one of the discoveries of Jöns Jakob Berzelius and is named for the goddess of the Moon, Selene, in the Greek pantheon. I suppose he had a reason.

There is a very apparent reason, though, for the name of No. 35. The Greek word *brómos* means "stench" and the discoverer, the Frenchman Antoine-Jérôme Balard (1825), found out during his experiments that some of the compounds offend the nose. The name of No. 36 is Greek, too, for *krypton* means "hidden" and that's how Sir William Ramsay found it—concealed among the other so-called noble gases.

The names of the next few elements in the table are also simple, once you know what they mean. No. 37 is rubidium because of its ruby-red line in the spectrum; No. 38 is strontium after Strontian in County Argyll, Scotland; No. 39 is yttrium after Ytterby in

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Sweden; and No. 40 is zirconium after the name of the gem.

No. 41 was once called columbium in English-speaking countries, where students had to remember that the symbol for columbium was Nb. The origin of the symbol, the international name niobium, has now been officially accepted and columbium will hence be found only in out-of-date textbooks.

No. 42, its discoverer Peter Jakob Hjelm of Sweden thought in 1781, looks rather like lead. Using the Greek name *molybdos,* meaning lead, he called it molybdenum. No. 43 was originally called Masurium, after the landscape of Masuren in East Prussia. But since the two discoverers, Drs. Walter Noddack and Ida Tacke, merely proved its existence while Oak Ridge actually produced it, the original name has been discarded in favor of technecium from the Greek *techné,* "skill."

No. 43, discovered in 1844 by Karl Karlovitch Klaus, was also given a geographical name, ruthenium, from Ruthenia — Russia. The interesting point is that G. W. Osann gave it the same name in 1828, sixteen years prior to actual isolation. Nos. 45 and 46 were both discovered by William Hyde Wollaston in 1803-4; No. 45 was called rhodium from the Greek word *rhodos* for "rose," while No. 46 was called palladium, after the then newly discovered planetoid Pallas.

Silver is No. 47 and known for so long a time that the meaning of the name is lost; the symbol Ag is from the Latin name for it, *argentum.* No. 48, cadmium, is named after the mineral cadmea; No. 49, indium, has nothing directly to do with India, being derived from the indigo-blue line in its spectrum—but the name of that color is derived from the name of the plant, which in turn honors the geographical area. No. 50, tin, is one of the long known elements; the symbol Sn is from the Latin name *stannum.*

The very similar symbol for No. 51, Sb, stands for the Latin name *stibium,* but the English word antimony is Latin, too. Its origin is the first two words *anti monachon,* "against the monks," in an edict of Frances II of France, forbidding its medicinal use by clergy.

No. 52, tellurium, is from the Latin *tellus* for Earth; No. 53, iodine, from the Greek *ioeides* for the color violet; and No. 54, xenon, one of Sir William Ramsey's Greek names, means "stranger." Both No. 55 caesium (from Latin *caesius,* "bluish") and No. 56, barium, (from Greek *barys,* "heavy") seem to make no sense, for caesium looks like silver and

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barium is hardly heavier than aluminum. But "bluish" refers to a line in the spectrum and "heavy" refers to the mineral.

The numbers 57 to 71 are the so-called rare earth elements of which a chemist once wrote that they pursue the chemist in his dreams, that they split like amebas and that their chronology looks like a list of "begats" from the Old Testament.

Their names reflect some of the unhappiness they seem to have caused. No. 57, lanthanum, is from the Greek word *lanthano*, which means "to escape notice." No. 58, cerium, was named in 1803 after the recently discovered planetoid Ceres (not after the goddess directly); No. 59, praseodymium, is Greek again, meaning "green twin." No. 60, neodymium, is also Greek: "new twin" (the former didymium had split in two). No. 61, long missing, was first called Illinium (University of Illinois), but Oak Ridge, after definite identification, changed that to promethium, from Prometheus, the mythical giver of fire.

No. 62, samarium, was named by a Frenchman after the Russian mine inspector Samarski. No. 63, europium, was also named by a Frenchman, Demarçay, after the continent, of course. No. 64, gadolinium, was named in honor of the Finnish chemist Gadolin; No. 65, Terbium, after Ytterby in Sweden; No. 66, dysprosium, comes from the Greek word *dysprosopon*, which means "difficult mask." No. 67, Holmium, is derived from Holmia, the Latin name of Stockholm; No. 68, erbium, again after Ytterby; No. 69, thulium, from Thule, the hard-to-identify northern land of Pytheas of Massilia.

No. 70 is ytterbium, *again* Ytterby in Sweden! That place has a total of *four* elements named after it, three of them rare earths, all found in the unusually interesting mine that is located there.

No. 71, lutetium, comes from Lutetia, the Latin name for Paris, and No. 72, the first element after the rare earth group, is hafnium, from Kjöbenhavn, the Danish spelling of Copenhagen. Its discoverer was a Hungarian, Georg von Hevesy, but he commemorated the city in which he made the discovery (in 1923).

There was once, you probably remember, a mythical shade who was punished after death by being made to stand in water up to his neck, but every time he tried to bend down and quench his thirst, the water receded. When Gustaf Ekeberg found (in 1802) a metal which is insoluble in most acids, he thought of this

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ancient victim and named the metal after him: tantalum. Tantalus, by the way, had a daughter by the name of Niobe and she provided the name for No. 41.

Tungsten is the Swedish word for "heavy stone" and was once the name of element No. 74. But its chemical symbol was W for Wolfram, which was adopted two years ago by an international congress, so tungsten is no longer correct. No. 75, rhenium, discovered by the same team which announced "masurium," got its name from the Latin *Rhenus,* "Rhine." No. 76 is osmium, actually not a flattering name because *osmé* (Greek) means "bad odor." Its discoverer, the Englishman Smithson Tennant, also discovered No. 77, iridium, which he named because of its iridescent solutions. No. 78 is platinum, a Spanish word meaning "little silver." No. 79 is gold; the Germanic word is essentially a parallel form of the word "yellow" for quite obvious reasons. The symbol Au is from the Latin name *aurum.* No. 80 is mercury (in German still *Quecksilber*), the symbol Hg coming from the old name *hydrargium.* No. 81, thallium, derives from the Greek *thallos,* "green twig."

Lead is No. 82 and the word is probably a variant of "load" (you used it to weigh down things, but lodestone, which is magnetic iron ore, comes from the verb "to lead"). The German name, *Blei,* is derived from that old Germanic word *blâ* which means both "black" and "blue;" to this day, a German soldier will refer to bullets as "blue beans." The symbol Pb is from the Latin *plumbum,* which is also the root of "plumber." No. 83, bismuth, has an originally German name, which in modern rendering would read *Wiesematte* and denotes a "flowering meadow", a name that makes sense if you know the colorful display of a pan of hardening bismuth.

Above bismuth, we get into the realm of the radioactive elements, mostly of recent discovery and with artificial names. No. 84 is polonium, so named by Madame Sklodowska-Curie after her native Poland. No. 85, first called alabamine (after the state) is now known as astatine from the Greek *astasia,* "unsteady". No. 86 is radon, once called "emanation," from the Latin *radius* for "ray;" No. 88, radium, has the same derivation.

No. 87, discovered in 1947 by Mlle. Marguerite Perey, is called franchium, and No. 89 is actinium. Of the radioactive elements, only the more stable ones, No. 90, thorium, and No. 92, uranium, have been known for a considerable time. The former

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was discovered by Jöns Jakob Berzelius and named after the Norse god Thor, the latter by Martin Heinrich Klaproth and named after the planet Uranus.

No. 91 is protactinium and above 92 we have the obvious neptunium (No. 93) and plutonium (No. 94); americium ("made in America") as No. 95; curium (after Madame Curie) as No. 96 and, so far the heaviest, Berkelium (Berkeley, Calif.) as No. 97.

As you can see, naming elements is an arbitrary, inaccurate and often sentimental business. Luckily, the origins quickly lose their identities and we are aware only of the properties of these basic substances. And they did, after all, need *some* name and these do as well as any others.

—WILLY LEY

ANY QUESTIONS?

How would the pilot of a ship in space recognize Earth at a glance and could he tell his distance, even roughly, by its brightness?

Earth could be recognized by its color and by the presence of a single large moon. Mars, when seen from space, looks reddish, Venus a pure white, while Earth must be blue-green. Saturn, of course, has its rings as a distinctive feature and Jupiter its stripes and four large moons. If the ship were at the orbit of Venus, Earth can look six times as brilliant as Venus at her brightest appears to us. Even the Moon would be almost as bright as Venus is to us. Seen from the orbit of Mars, Earth would look about as bright as Jupiter does from Earth at greatest proximity. If the ship is at points outside the orbit of Jupiter, the pilot would need instruments to see Earth, which at such distance would be "lost" in the glare of the Sun.

Just what is the velocity of light? 186,000 miles per second sounds like a rounded-off figure.

It is, and so is the customary metric equivalent of 300,000 kilometers per second. The *Observer's Handbook* gives the more precise value of 299,774 km. p. sec. Some values obtained in 1949 and 1950 by various investigators read as follows:

Aslakson	**299,792 + 2.4**
Essen	**299,792.5 + 3.0**
Bol	**299,798.3 + 0.4**
Bergstrand	**299,792.7 + 0.25**

In your Conquest of Space *you list the planetoid* Adonis *as the one which comes nearest to the Sun, staying just outside the orbit of Mercury. But since the orbit*

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of Mercury is so eccentric, isn't it possible that Adonis *might cross the orbit of Mercury on occasion?*

To the best of our knowledge *Adonis* does not. But we now know a male planetoid that does. It has been appropriately named *Icarus* and it gets much closer to the Sun than the mythical Icarus ever did. Mercury, when closest to the Sun, is 0.31 astronomical units (one astronomical unit, or A.U., is the distance of Earth from the Sun) from the primary, while *Icarus* gets to within 0.20 A.U. or around 19 million miles. Maximum distance of *Icarus* from the sun is 1.97 A.U., roughly twice that of Earth. More precisely, it is 183 million miles. The small planetoid is less than a mile in diameter and probably reaches a temperature of 1000° F. at perihelion.

In the film Destination Moon, *there is a short sentence hinting at the use of titanium for spaceship construction. In what respect would titanium be superior to other metals? I have not seen it used anywhere.*

The reason why titanium is not in use right now to a noticeable extent is simply due to the fact that it became commercially available only two years or so ago. I have seen some small parts made of it. It looks like silver, though less shiny, and has generally the characteristics of stainless steel. It differs from steel in two respects of interest to an engineer—it is non-magnetic, and its specific gravity is only 4.5 while that of steel is 7.8. Heinlein probably picked titanium as a "light-weight steel" for construction purposes.

Why is it that you get ice cubes faster if you put lukewarm water into the trays of your refrigerator rather than ice water?

If I had not been prepared, this question would have surprised me no end. But a few years ago I talked to one of the researchers of the Bureau of Standards in Washington, D. C., who told me that this is a fairly widespread popular superstition and that the Bureau received so many inquiries about it that they finally decided to test it. The answer is astonishingly simple: because of the high latent heat of water, a few degrees more or less do not make a difference which could be noticed without measuring it. Of course, the colder the water, the sooner it will freeze, but the freezing difference between water of 35° F and water of 55° F is about one minute.

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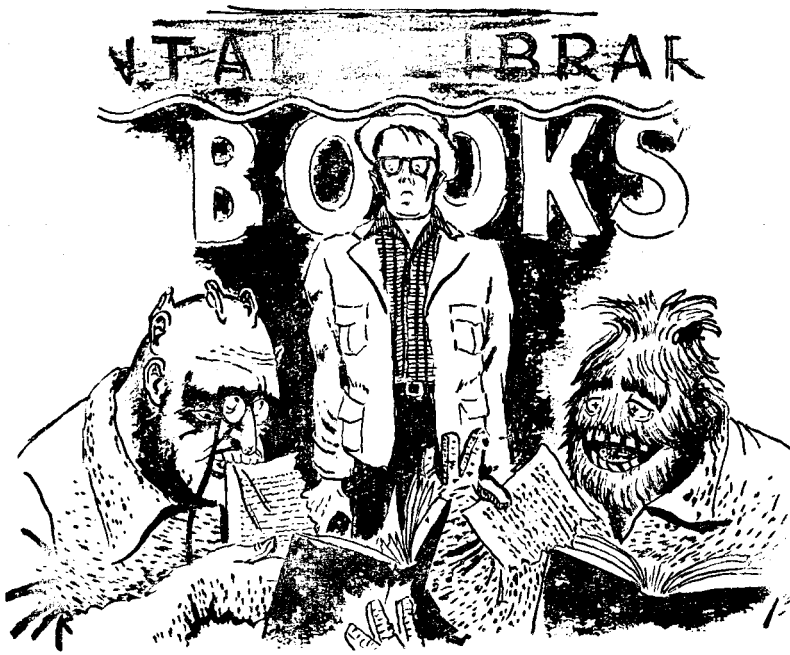

Freudian Slip

By FRANKLIN ABEL

Illustrated by HARRINGTON

Things are exactly what they seem? Life is real? Life is earnest? Well, that depends.

ON the day the Earth vanished, Herman Raye was earnestly fishing for trout, hip-deep in a mountain stream in upstate New York.

Herman was a tall, serious, sensitive, healthy, well-muscled young man with an outsize jaw and a brush of red-brown hair. He wore spectacles to correct a

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slight hyperopia, and they had heavy black rims because he knew his patients expected it. In his off hours, he was fond of books with titles like *Personality and the Behavior Disorders, Self-esteem and Sexuality in Women, Juvenile Totem and Taboo: A study of adolescent culture-groups,* and *A New Theory of Economic Cycles;* but he also liked baseball, beer and bebop.

This day, the last of Herman's vacation, was a perfect specimen: sunny and still, the sky dotted with antiseptic tufts of cloud. The trout were biting. Herman had two in his creel, and was casting into the shallow pool across the stream in the confident hope of getting another, when the Universe gave one horrible sliding lurch.

Herman braced himself instinctively, shock pounding through his body, and looked down at the pebbly stream-bed under his feet.

It wasn't there.

He was standing, to all appearances, in three feet of clear water with sheer, black nothing under it: nothing, the abysmal color of a moonless night, pierced by the diamond points of a half-dozen incredible stars.

He had only that single glimpse; then he found himself gazing across at the pool under the far bank, whose waters reflected the tranquil imagery of trees. He raised his casting rod, swung it back over his shoulder, brought it forward again with a practiced flick of his wrist, and watched the lure drop.

Within the range of his vision now, everything was entirely normal; nevertheless, Herman wanted very much to stop fishing and look down to see if that horrifying void was still there. He couldn't do it.

Doggedly, he tried again and again. The result was always the same. It was exactly as if he were a man who had made up his mind to fling himself over a cliff, or break a window and snatch a loaf of bread, or say in a loud voice to an important person at a party, "I think you stink." Determination was followed by effort, by ghastly, sweating, heart-stopping fear, by relief as he gave up and did something else.

All right, he thought finally, *there's no point going on with it. Data established: hallucination, compulsion, inhibition. Where do we go from here?*

The obvious first hypothesis was that he was insane. Herman considered that briefly, and left the question open. Three or four selected psychoanalyst jokes paraded through his mind, led by the classic, "You're fine, how am I?"

There was this much truth, he thought, in the popular belief

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that all analysts were a little cracked themselves: a good proportion of the people who get all the way through the man-killing course that makes an orthodox analyst—a course in which an M. D. degree is only a beginning—are impelled to do so in the first place by a consuming interest in their own neuroses. Herman, for example, from the age of fifteen up until the completion of his own analysis at twenty-six, had been so claustrophobic that he couldn't force himself into a subway car or an elevator.

But was he now insane?

Can a foot-rule measure itself?

Herman finished. At an appropriate hour he waded ashore, cleaned his catch, cooked it and ate it. Where the ground had been bare around his cooking spot, he saw empty darkness, star-studded, rimmed by a tangled webwork of bare rootlets. He tried to go on looking at it when he had finished eating the fish. He couldn't.

After the meal, he tried to take out his notebook and pen. He couldn't.

In fact, it occurred to him, *he was helpless to do anything that he wouldn't normally have done.*

Pondering that discovery, after he had cleaned his utensils and finished his other chores, Herman crawled into his tent and went to sleep.

Burying the garbage had been an unsettling experience. Like a lunatic building a machine nobody else can see, he had lifted successive shovels-full of nothing, dropped the empty cans and rubbish ten inches into nothing, and shoveled nothing carefully over them again . . .

THE light woke him, long before dawn. From where he lay on his back, he could see an incredible pale radiance streaming upward all around him, outlining the shadow of his body at the ridge of the tent, picking out the under-surfaces of the trees against the night sky. He strained, until he was weak and dizzy, to roll over so that he could see its source; but he had to give up and wait another ten minutes until his body turned "naturally," just as if he had still been asleep.

Then he was looking straight down into a milky transparency that started under his nose and continued into unguessable depths. First came the matted clumps of grass, black against the light, every blade and root as clear as if they had been set in transparent plastic. Then longer, writhing roots of trees and shrubs, sprouting thickets of hair-thin rootlets. Between these, and continuing downward level by level, was spread an infinity of tiny specks, seed-shapes, spores. Some

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of them moved, Herman realized with a shock. Insects burrowing in the emptiness where the Earth should be?

In the morning, when he crawled out of the tent and went to the bottomless stream to wash, he noticed something he had missed the day before. The network of grasses gave springily under his feet—not like turf, but like stretched rubber. Herman conceived an instant dislike for walking, especially when he had to cross bare ground, because when that happened, he felt exactly what he saw: nothing whatever underfoot. "Walking on air," he realized, was not as pleasant an experience as the popular songs would lead you to expect.

Herman shaved, cooked and ate breakfast, washed the dishes, did the chores, and packed up his belongings. With a mighty effort, he pried out the tent stakes, which were bedded in nothing but a loose network of roots. He shouldered the load and carried it a quarter of a mile through pine woods to his car.

The car stood at ground level, but the ground was not there any more. The road was now nothing more than a long, irregular trough formed by the spreading roots of the pines on either side. Shuddering, Herman stowed his gear in the trunk and got in behind the wheel.

When he put the motor into gear, the sedan moved sedately and normally forward. But the motor raced madly, and there was no feeling that it was taking hold. With screaming engine, Herman drove homeward over a nonexistent road. Inwardly and silently, he gibbered.

Six miles down the mountain, he pulled up beside a white-painted fence enclosing a neat yard and a fussy little blue-shuttered house. On the opposite side of the fence stood a middle-aged woman with a floppy hat awry on her head and a gardening trowel in one of her gloved hands. She looked up with an air of vague dismay when he got out of the car.

"Some more eggs today, Dr. Raye?" she asked, and smiled. The smile was like painted china. Her eyes, lost in her fleshy face, were clearly trying not to look downward.

"Not today, Mrs. Richards," Herman said. "I just stopped to say good-by. I'm on my way home."

"Isn't that a shame?" she said mechanically. "Well, come again next year."

Herman wanted to say, "Next year I'll probably be in a straitjacket." He tried to say it. He stuttered, "N-n-n-n—"and ended, glancing at the ground at her feet, "Transplanting some petunias?"

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The woman's mouth worked. She said, "Yes. I thought I might's well put them along here, where they'd get more sun. Aren't they pretty?"

"Very pretty," said Herman helplessly.

The petunias, roots as naked as if they had been scrubbed, were nesting in a bed of stars. Mrs. Richards' gloves and trowel were spotlessly clean.

ON Fourth Avenue, below Fourteenth Street, Herman met two frightful little men.

He had expected the city to be better, but it was worse; it was a nightmare. The avenues between the buildings were bottomless troughs of darkness. The bedrock was gone; the concrete was gone; the asphalt was gone.

The buildings themselves were hardly recognizable unless you knew what they were. New York had been a city of stone—built on stone, built of stone, as cold as stone.

Uptown, the city looked half-built, but insanely occupied, a forest of orange-painted girders. In the Village the old brick houses were worse. No brick; no mortar; nothing but the grotesque shells of rooms in lath and a paper-thickness of paint.

The wrought-iron railings were gone, too.

On Fourth Avenue, bookseller's row, you could almost persuade yourself that nothing had happened, provided you did not look down. The buildings had been made of wood, and wood they remained. The second-hand books in their wooden racks would have been comforting except that they were so clean. There was not a spot of dirt anywhere; the air was more than country-pure.

There was an insane selective principle at work here, Herman realized. Everything from bedrock to loam that belonged to the Earth itself had disappeared. So had everything that had a mineral origin and been changed by refinement and mixture: concrete, wrought iron, brick, but steel and glass, porcelain and paint remained. It looked as if the planet had been the joint property of two children, one of whom didn't want to play any more, so they had split up their possessions—this is yours, this is yours, this is *mine* . . .

The two little men popped into view not six feet in front of Herman as he was passing a sidewalk bookstall. Both were dressed in what looked like workmen's overalls made of lucite chain-mail, or knitted glow-worms. One of them had four eyes, two brown, two blue, with spectacles for the middle pair. Ears grew like cabbages all over his bald head. The other had two eyes, the pupils

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of which were cross-shaped, and no other discernible features except when he opened his gap-toothed mouth: the rest of his head, face and all, was completely covered by a dense forest of red hair.

As they came forward, Herman's control of his body suddenly returned. He was trying his best to turn around and go away from there, and that was what his body started to do. Moreover, certain sounds of a prayerful character, namely "Oh dear sweet Jesus," which Herman was forming in his mind, involuntarily issued from his lips.

Before he had taken the first step in a rearward direction, however, the hairy little man curved around him in a blur of motion, barring the way with two long, muscular, red-furred arms. Herman turned. The four-eyed little man had closed in. Herman, gasping, backed up against the bookstall.

People who were headed directly for them, although showing no recognition that Herman and the little men were there, moved stiffly aside like dancing automatons, strode past, then made another stiff sidewise motion to bring them back to the original line of march before they went on their way.

"Olaph dzenn Härm Rai gjo glerr-dregnarr?" demanded Hairy.

Herman gulped, half-stunned. "Huh?" he said.

Hairy turned to Four-Eyes. "Grinnr alaz harisi nuya."

"Izzred alph! Meggi erd-halaza riggbörd els kamma gredyik. Lukhhal!"

Hairy turned back to Herman. Blinking his eyes rapidly, for they closed like the shutter of a camera, he made a placating gesture with both huge furry hands. "Kelagg ikri odrum faz," he said, and, reaching out to the bookstall, he plucked out a handful of volumes, fanned them like playing cards and displayed them to Four-Eyes. A heated discussion ensued, at the end of which Hairy kept *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Four-Eyes took *The Blonde in the Bathtub*, and Hairy threw the rest away.

Then, while Herman gaped and made retching sounds, the two disgusting little men tore pages out of the books and stuffed them in their mouths. When they finished the pages, they ate the bindings. Then there was a rather sick pause while they seemed to digest the contents of the books they had literally devoured. Herman had the wild thought that they were blurb writers whose jobs had gone to their heads.

The one with the four eyes rolled three of them horribly. "That's more like it," he said in nasal but recognizable English.

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"Let's start over. Are you Herman Raye, the skull doc?"

Herman produced a series of incoherent sounds.

"My brother expresses himself crudely," said Hairy in a rich, fruity baritone. "Please forgive him. He is a man of much heart."

"Uh?" said Herman.

"Truly," said Hairy. "And of much ears," he added with a glance at his companion. "But again, as to this affair—tell me true, are you Herman Raye, the analyst of minds?"

"Suppose I am?" Herman asked cautiously.

Hairy turned to Four-eyes. "Arghraz iktri 'Suppose I am,' Gurh? Olaph iktri erz ogromat, lekh—"

"Talk English, can't you?" Four-eyes broke in. "You know he don't understand that caveman jabber. Anyhow, yeah, yeah, it's him. He just don't want to say so." He reached out and took Herman by the collar. "Come on, boy, the boss is waitin'."

There were two circular hairlines of glowing crimson where Hairy and Four-eyes had originally appeared. They reached the spot in one jump, Hairy bringing up the rear.

"But tell me truly," he said anxiously. "You *are* that same Herman Raye?"

Herman paid no attention. Below, under the two glowing circles, was the terrifying gulf that had replaced the Earth; and this time, Herman was somehow convinced, it was not going to hold him up.

"Let go!" he shouted, struggling. "Ouch!" He had struck Four-eyes squarely on the flat nose, and it felt as if he had slugged an anvil.

Paying no attention, Four-eyes turned Herman over, pinned his arms to his sides, and dropped him neatly through the larger of the two circles.

Herman shut his eyes tightly and despairingly repeated the multiplication table up to 14 x 14. When he opened them again, he was apparently hanging in midspace, with Hairy to his left and Four-eyes to his right. The visible globe around them was so curiously tinted and mottled that it took Herman a long time to puzzle it out. Ahead of them was the darkest area—the void he had seen before. This was oval in shape, and in places the stars shone through it clearly. In others, they were blocked off entirely or dimmed by a sort of haze.

Surrounding this, and forming the rest of the sphere, was an area that shaded from gold shot with violet at the borders, to an unbearable blaze of glory at the center, back the way they had come and a little to the right. Within this lighted section were

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other amorphous areas which were much darker, almost opaque; and still others where the light shone through diluted to a ruddy ghost of itself, like candlelight through parchment.

Gradually Herman realized that the shapes and colors he saw were the lighted and dark hemispheres of Earth. The dark areas were the oceans, deep enough in most places to shut out the light altogether, and those parts of the continents, North and South America behind him, Europe and Asia ahead, Africa down to the right, which were heavily forested.

Herman's earlier conviction returned. Things like this just did not happen. *Physician, heal thyself!*

"You're not real," he said bitterly to Four-eyes.

"Not very," Four-eyes agreed. "I'm twice as real as that jerk, though," he insisted, pointing to Hairy.

Ahead of them, or "below," a point of orange light was slowly swelling. Herman watched it without much interest.

Hairy broke out into a torrent of cursing. "I this and that in the milk of your this!" he said. "I this, that and the other in the this of your that. Your sister! Your cousin! Your grandmother's uncle!"

Four-eyes listened with awed approval. "Them was good books, hah?" he asked happily.

"Better than those scratchings in the caves," Hairy said.

"Something to think about till they haul us out again. Well," said Four-eyes philosophically, "here we are."

THE orange spot had enlarged into the semblance of a lighted room, rather like a stage setting. Inside were two enormous Persons, one sitting, one standing. Otherwise, and except for three upholstered chairs, the room was bare. No—as they swooped down toward it, Herman blinked and looked again. A leather couch had appeared against the far wall.

At the last moment, there was a flicker of motion off to Herman's left. Something that looked like a short, pudgy human being accompanied by two little men the size of Hairy and Four-eyes whooshed off into the distance, back toward the surface of the planet.

Herman landed. Hairy and Four-eyes, after bowing low to the standing Person, turned and leaped out of the room. When Herman, feeling abandoned, turned to see where they had gone, he discovered that the room now had four walls and no windows or doors.

The Person said, "How do you do, Doctor Raye?"

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Herman looked at him. Although his figure had a disquieting tendency to quiver and flow, so that it was hard to judge, he seemed to be about eight feet tall. He was dressed in what would have seemed an ordinary dark-blue business suit, with an equally ordinary white shirt and blue tie, except that all three garments had the sheen of polished metal. His face was bony and severe, but not repellently so; he looked absent-minded rather than stern.

The other Person, whose suit was brown, had a broad, kindly and rather stupid face; his hair was white. He sat quietly, not looking at Herman, or, apparently, at anything else.

Herman sat down in one of the upholstered chairs. "All right," he said with helpless defiance. "What's it all about?"

"I'm glad we can come to the point at once," said the Person. He paused, moving his lips silently. "Ah, excuse me. I'm sorry." A second head, with identical features, popped into view next to the first. His eyes were closed. "It's necessary, I'm afraid," said head number one apologetically. "I have so much to remember, you know."

Herman took a deep breath and said nothing.

"You may call me Secundus, if you like," resumed the Person, "and this gentleman Primus, since it is with him that you will have principally to deal. Now, our problem here is one of amnesia, and I will confess to you frankly that we ourselves are totally inadequate to cope with it. In theory, we are not subject to disorders of the mind, and that's what makes us so vulnerable now that it has happened. Do you see?"

A fantastic suspicion crept into Herman's mind. "Just a moment," he said carefully. "If you don't mind telling me, what is it that you have to remember?"

"Well, Doctor, my field is human beings; that's why it became my duty to search you out and consult with you. And there *is* a great deal for me to carry in my mind, you know, especially under these abnormal conditions. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say it is a full-time job."

"Are you going to tell me," asked Herman, more carefully still, "that this — gentleman — is the one who is supposed to remember the Earth itself? The rocks and minerals and so on?"

"Yes, exactly. I was about to tell you—"

"And that the planet has disappeared because he has amnesia?" Herman demanded on a rising note.

Secundus beamed. "Concisely expressed. I myself, being, so

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to speak, saturated with the thoughts and habits of human beings, who are, you must admit, a garrulous race, could not—"

"Oh, no!" said Herman.

"Oh, yes," Secundus corrected. "I can understand that the idea is difficult for you to accept, since you naturally believe that you yourself have a real existence, or, to be more precise, that you belong to the world of phenomena as opposed to that of noumena." He beamed "Now I will be silent, a considerable task for me, and let you ask questions."

Herman fought a successful battle with his impulse to stand up and shout "To hell with it!" He had been through a great deal, but he was a serious and realistic young man. He set himself to think the problem through logically. If, as seemed more than probable, Secundus, Primus, Hairy, Four-eyes, and this whole Alice-in-Wonderland situation existed only as his hallucinations, then it did not matter much whether he took them seriously or not. If they were real, then he wasn't, and vice versa. It didn't make any difference which was which.

He relaxed deliberately and folded his hands against his abdomen. "Let me see if I can get this clear," he said. "I'm a noumenon, not a phenomenon. In cruder terms, I exist only in your mind. Is that true?"

Secundus beamed. "Correct."

"If *you* got amnesia, I and the rest of the human race would disappear."

Secundus looked worried. "That is also correct, and if that should happen, you will readily understand that we *would* be in difficulty. The situation is extremely — But pardon me. I had promised to be silent except when answering questions."

"This is the part I fail to understand, Mr. Secundus. I gather that you brought me here to treat Mr. Primus. Now, if I exist as a thought in your mind, you necessarily know everything I know. Why don't you treat him yourself?"

Secundus shook his head disapprovingly. "Oh, no, Dr. Raye, that is not the case at all. It cannot be said that I *know* everything that you know; rather we should say that I *remember* you. In other words, that I maintain your existence by an act of memory. The two functions, knowledge and memory, are not identical, although, of course, the second cannot be considered to exist without the first. But before we become entangled in our own terms, I should perhaps remind you that when I employ the word 'memory' I am only making use of a convenient approximation. Perhaps it would be helpful to

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say that my memory is comparable to the structure-memory of a living organism, although that, too, has certain semantic disadvantages. Were you about to make a remark, Doctor?"

"It still seems to me," Herman said stubbornly, "that if you remember me, structurally or otherwise, that includes everything I remember. If you're going to tell me that you remember human knowledge, including Freudian theory and practice, but are unable to manipulate it, that seems to me to be contradicted by internal evidence in what you've already said. For example, it's clear that in the field of epistemology—the knowledge of knowledge, you might say—you have the knowledge *and* manipulate it."

"Ah," said Secundus, smiling shyly, "but, you see, that happens to be my line. Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, being specializations, are not. As I mentioned previously, persons of our order are theoretically not capable of psychic deterioration. That is why we come to you, Dr. Raye. We are unable to help ourselves; we ask your help. We place ourselves unreservedly in your hands."

The question, "How was I chosen?" occurred to Herman, but he left it unasked. He knew that the answer was much likelier to be, "At random," than, "Because we wanted the most brilliant and talented psychoanalyst on the planet."

"I gather that I'm not the first person you've tried," he said.

"Oh, you saw Dr. Buddolphson departing? Yes, it is true that in our ignorance of the subject we did not immediately turn to practitioners of your psychological orientation. In fact, if you will not be offended, I may say that you are practically our last hope. We have already had one eminent gentleman whose method was simply to talk over Mr. Primus's problems with him and endeavor to help him reach an adjustment; he failed because Mr. Primus, so far as he is aware, has no problems except that he has lost his memory. Then we had another whose system, as he explained it to me, was simply to repeat, in a sympathetic manner, everything that the patient said to him; Mr. Primus was not sufficiently prolix for this method to be of avail.

"Then there was another who wished to treat Mr. Primus by encouraging him to relive his past experiences: 'taking him back along the time-track,' as he called it; but—" Secundus looked mournful—"Mr. Primus has actually *had* no experiences in the usual sense of the term, though he very obligingly made up a number of them. Our ontogeny, Dr. Raye, is so simple that it can

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scarcely be said to exist at all. Each of us normally has only one function, the one I have already mentioned, and, until this occurrence, it has always been fulfilled successfully.

"We also had a man who proposed to reawaken Mr. Primus's memory by electric shock, but Mr. Primus is quite impervious to currents of electricity and we were unable to hit upon an acceptable substitute. In short, Dr. Raye, if you should prove unable to help us, we will have no one left to fall back upon except, possibly, the Yogi."

"They might do you more good, at that," Herman said, looking at Mr. Primus. "Well, I'll do what I can, though the function of analysis is to get the patient to accept reality, and this is the opposite. What can you tell me, to begin with, about Mr. Primus's personality, the onset of the disturbance, and so on—and, in particular, what are you two? Who's your boss? What's it all for and how does it work?"

Secundus said, "I can give you very little assistance, I am afraid. I would characterize Primus as a very steady person, extremely accurate in his work, but not very imaginative. His memory loss occurred abruptly, as you yourself witnessed yesterday afternoon. As to your other questions—forgive me, Dr. Raye, but it is to your own advantage if I fail to answer them. I am, of course, the merest amateur in psychology, but I sincerely feel that your own psyche might be damaged if you were to learn the fragment of the truth which I could give you."

He paused. A sheaf of papers, which Herman had not noticed before, lay on a small table that he had not noticed, either. Secundus picked them up and handed them over.

"Here are testing materials," he said. "If you need anything else, you have only to call on me. But I trust you will find these complete."

He turned to go. "And one more thing, Dr. Raye," he said with an apologetic smile. "*Hurry*, if you possibly can."

PRIMUS, looking rather like a sarcophagus ornament, lay limply supine on the ten-foot couch, arms at his sides, eyes closed. When Herman had first told him to relax, Primus had had to have the word carefully explained to him; from then on he had done it—or seemed to do it—perfectly.

In his preliminary tests, the Binet, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Index and the Berneuter P. I., he had drawn almost a complete blank. Standard testing methods did not work on Mr.

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Primus, and the reason was obvious enough. Mr. Primus simply was not a human being.

This room, no doubt, was an illusion, and so was Mr. Primus's anthropomorphic appearance . . .

Herman felt like a surgeon trying to operate blindfolded while wearing a catcher's mitt on each hand. But he kept trying; he was getting results, though whether or not they meant anything, he was unable to guess.

On the Rorschach they had done a little better, at least in volume of response. "That looks like a cliff," Primus would say eagerly. "That looks like a—piece of sandstone. This part looks like two volcanoes and a cave." Of course, Herman realized, the poor old gentleman was only trying to please him. He had no more idea than a goldfish what a volcano or a rock looked like, but he wanted desperately to help.

Even so, it was possible to score the results. According to Herman's interpretation, Primus was a case of arrested infantile sexualism, with traces of conversion hysteria and a strong Oedipus complex. Herman entered the protocol solemnly in his notes and kept going.

Next came free association, and, after that, recounting of dreams. Feeling that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, Herman carefully explained to Primus what "sleep" and "dreams" were.

Primus had promised to do his best; he had been lying there now, without moving, for—how long? Startled, Herman looked at his watch. It had stopped.

Scoring the Rorschach alone, Herman realized suddenly, should have taken him nearly a full day, even considering the fact that he hadn't eaten anything, or taken time out to rest, or— Herman bewilderedly felt his jaw. There was only the slightest stubble. He didn't feel hungry or tired, or cramped from sitting . . .

"Secundus!" he called.

A door opened in the wall to his right, and Secundus stepped through. The door disappeared.

"Yes, Dr. Raye? Is anything wrong?"

"How long have I been here?"

Secundus' right-hand head looked embarrassed. "Well, Doctor, without bringing in the difficult questions of absolute versus relative duration, and the definition of an arbitrary position—"

"Don't stall. How long have I been here in my own subjective time?"

"Well, I was about to say, without being unnecessarily inclusive, the question is still very difficult. However, bearing in mind that the answer is only a rough approximation—about one hundred hours."

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Herman rubbed his chin. "I don't like your tampering with me," he said slowly. "You've speeded me up—is that it? And at the same time inhibited my fatigue reactions, and God knows what else, so that I didn't even notice I'd been working longer than I normally could until just now?"

Secundus looked distressed. "I'm afraid I have made rather a botch of it, Dr. Raye. I should not have allowed you to notice at all, but it is growing increasingly difficult to restrain your fellow-creatures to their ordinary routines. My attention strayed, I am sorry to say." He glanced at the recumbent form of Primus. "My word! What is Mr. Primus doing, Dr. Raye?"

"Sleeping," Herman answered curtly.

"Remarkable! I hope he does not make a habit of it. Will he awaken soon, do you think, Doctor?"

"I have no idea," said Herman helplessly; but at that moment Primus stirred, opened his eyes, and sat up with his usual vague, kindly smile.

"Did you dream?" Herman asked him.

Primus blinked slowly. "Yes. Yes, I did," he said in his profoundly heavy voice.

"Tell me all you can remember about it."

"Well, said Primus, sinking back onto the couch, "I dreamed I was in a room with a large bed. It had heavy wooden posts and a big bolster. I wanted to lie down and rest in the bed, but the bolster made me uncomfortable. It was too dark to see, to rearrange the bed, so I tried to light a candle, but the matches kept going out . . ."

Herman took it all down, word for word, with growing excitement and growing dismay. The dream was too good. It might have come out of Dr. Freud's original case histories. When Primus had finished, Herman searched back through his notes. Did Primus *know* what a bed was, or what a bolster was, or a candle? How much had Herman told him?

"Bed" was there, of course. Primus: "What are 'dreams?'" Herman: "Well, when a human being goes to bed, and sleeps . . ." "Bolster" was there, too, but not in the same sense. Herman: "To bolster its argument, the unconscious—what we call the id—frequently alters the person's likes and dislikes on what seem to be petty and commonplace subjects . . ." And "candle?" Herman: "I want you to understand that I don't know all about this subject myself, Mr. Primus. Nobody does; our knowledge is just a candle in the darkness . . ."

Herman gave up. He glanced

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at Secundus, who was watching him expectantly. "May I talk to you privately?"

"Of course." Secundus nodded to Primus, who stood up awkwardly and then vanished with a *pop*. Secundus tut-tutted regretfully.

Herman took a firm grip on himself. "Look," he said, "the data I have now suggest that Primus had some traumatic experience in his infancy which arrested his development in various ways and also strengthened his Oedipus complex—that is, intensified his feelings of fear, hatred and rivalry toward his father. Now, that may sound to you as if we're making some progress. I would feel that way myself—if I had the slightest reason for believing that Primus ever had a father."

Secundus started to speak; but Herman cut him off. "Wait, let me finish. I can go ahead on that basis, but as far as I'm concerned I might just as well be counting the angels on the head of a pin. You've got to give me more information, Secundus. I want to know who you are, and who Primus is, and whether there's any other being with whom Primus could possibly have a filial relationship. And if you can't tell me all that without giving me the Secret of the Universe, then you'd better give it to me whether it's good for me or not. I can't work in the dark."

Secundus pursed his lips. "There is justice in what you say, Doctor. Very well, I shall be entirely frank with you—in so far as it is possible for me to do so, of course. Let's see, where can I begin?"

"First question," retorted Herman. "Who are you?"

"We are—" Secundus thought a moment, then spread his hands with a helpless smile. "There are no words, Doctor. To put the case in negatives, we are not evolved organisms, we are not mortal, we are not, speaking in the usual sense, alive, although, of course—I hope you will not be offended—neither are you."

Herman's brow wrinkled. "Are you *real?*" he demanded finally.

Secundus looked embarrassed. "You have found me out, Dr. Raye. I endeavored to give you that impression—through vanity, I am ashamed to say—but, unhappily, it is not true. I, too, belong to the realm of noumena."

"Then, blast it all, what *is* real? This planet isn't. You're not. What's it all for?" He paused a moment reflectively. "We're getting on to my second question, about Primus's attitude toward his 'father.' Perhaps I should have asked just now, '*Who* is real?' Who remembers you, Secundus?"

"This question, unfortunately,

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is the one I cannot answer with complete frankness, Doctor. I assure you that it is not because I do not wish to; I have no option in the matter. I can tell you only that there is a Person of whom it might be said that He stands in the parental relationship to Primus, to me, and all the rest of our order."

"God?" Herman inquired. "Jahweh? Allah?"

"Please, no names, Doctor." Secundus looked apprehensive.

"Then, damn it, tell me the rest!" Herman realized vaguely that he was soothing his own hurt vanity at Secundus's expense, but he was enjoying himself too much to stop. "You're afraid of something; that's been obvious right along. And there must be a time limit on it, or you wouldn't be rushing me. Why? Are you afraid that if this unnamable Person finds out you've botched your job, He'll wipe you out of existence and start over with a new bunch?"

A cold wind blew down Herman's back. "Not us alone, Dr. Raye," said Secundus gravely. "If the Inspector discovers this blunder—and the time is coming soon when He must—no corrections will be attempted. When a mistake occurs, it is—painted out."

"Oh," said Herman after a moment. He sat down again, weakly. "How long have we got?"

"Approximately one and a quarter days have gone by at the Earth's normal rate since Primus lost his memory," Secundus said. "I have not been able to 'speed you up,' as you termed it, by more than a twenty-to-one ratio. The deadline will have arrived, by my calculation, in fifteen minutes of normal time, or five hours at your present accelerated rate."

Primus stepped into the room, crossed to the couch and lay down placidly. Secundus turned to go, then paused.

"As for your final question, Doctor—you might think of the Universe as a Pointillist painting, in which this planet is one infinitesimally small dot of color. The work is wholly imaginary, of course, since neither the canvas nor the pigment has what you would term an independent existence. Nevertheless, the artist takes it seriously. He would not care to find, so to speak, mustaches daubed on it."

Herman sat limply, staring after him as he moved to the door. Secundus turned once more.

"I hope you will not think that I am displeased with you, Doctor," he said. "On the contrary, I feel that you are accomplishing more than anyone else has. However, should you succeed, as I devoutly hope, there may not be sufficient time to congratulate you as you deserve. I shall have

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to replace you immediately in your normal world-line, for your absence would constitute as noticeable a flaw as that of the planet. In that event, my present thanks and congratulations will have to serve."

With a friendly smile, he disappeared.

Herman wound his watch.

Two hours later, Primus's answers to his questions began to show a touch of resentment and surly defiance. *Transference,* Herman thought, with a constriction of his throat, and kept working desperately.

Three hours. "What does the bolster remind you of?"

"I seem to see a big cylinder rolling through space, sweeping the stars out of its way . . ."

Four hours. Only three minutes left now, in the normal world. *I can't wait to get any deeper,* Herman thought. *It's got to be now or never.*

"You must understand that these feelings of resentment and hatred are normal," he said, trying to keep the strain out of his voice, "but, at the same time, you have outgrown them—you can rise above them now. You are an individual in your own right, Primus. You have a job to do that only you can fill, and it's an important job. That's what matters, not all this infantile emotional clutter . . ."

He talked on, not daring to look at his watch.

Primus looked up, and a huge smile broke over his face. He began, "Why, of—"

HERMAN found himself walking along Forty-second Street, heading toward the Hudson. The pavement was solid under his feet; the canyon between the buildings was filled with the soft violet-orange glow of a summer evening in New York. In the eyes of the people he passed, he saw the same incredulous relief he felt. It was over. He'd done it.

He'd broken all the rules, but, incredibly, he'd got results.

Then he looked up and a chill spread over him. No one who knew the city would accept that ithyphallic parody as the Empire State Building, or those huge fleshy curves, as wanton as the mountains in which Mr. Maugham's "Sadie Thompson" had her lusty existence, as the prosaic hills of New Jersey.

Psychoanalysis had certainly removed Mr. Primus's inhibitions. The world was like a fence scrawled on by a naughty little boy. Mr. Primus would outgrow it in time, but life until then might be somewhat disconcerting.

Those two clouds, for instance . . .

—FRANKLIN ABEL

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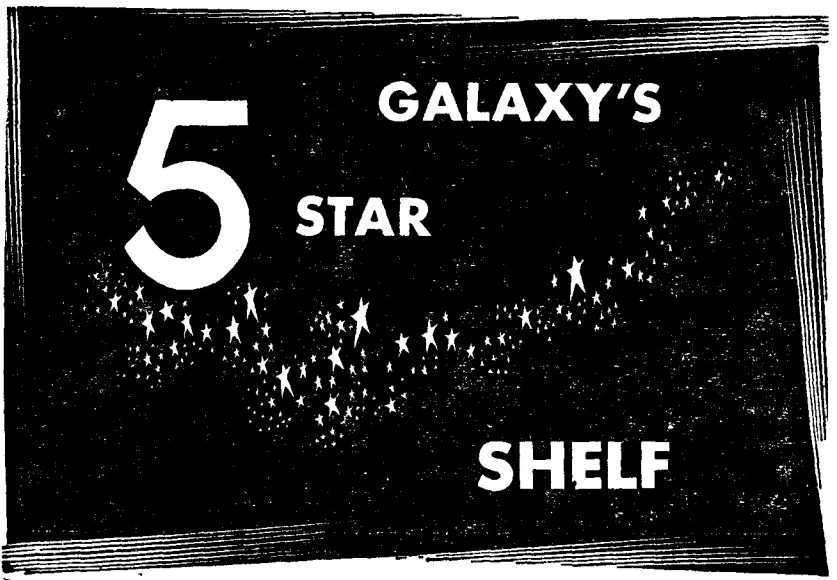

FANCIES AND GOOD-NIGHTS, by John Collier. Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1951. 364 *pages,* $4.00

THE subtitle of this volume is its own book review: "Tales Unlike Other Tales."

They are!

Most science fiction addicts know John Collier only through his famous "Green Thoughts," which appeared in the first science fiction anthology ever compiled, Donald Wollheim's *Pocket Book of Science Fiction.* "Green Thoughts" isn't science fiction, for John Collier never wrote any in his life. It happens, however, that he is the most distinguished living writer of imaginative, fantastical, demonological, shivery and sophisticated-supernatural stories, and any science fiction reader who foregoes this book has only himself to blame for having passed up one of the great reading experiences of modern times.

Don't miss Collier! You'll be a much more watery and uninspired individual than you are, if you do.

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BEYOND THE END OF TIME, edited by Frederik Pohl. Permabooks (Doubleday & Co., Inc.), New York, 1952. 407 *pages,* 35c

NINETEEN stories, all but four never anthologized before; for 35 cents the buy of the month. All but three of the stories rate "B" or better, too; and it contains one nearly great (and quite unknown) tale, as well. This is called "Scanners Live in Vain," and it is written by some pseudonymity known as Cordwainer Smith. It is one of the best tours de force in science fiction.

Another really magnificent tale is Fowler Wright's quietly irreversible comment on irresponsible science, called "Obvious Suicide."

There are also top-grade tales by Kornbluth, MacDonald, Leinster (he never fails!), Wyndham (alias both Harris and Beynon), MacCreigh, Finney (wonderful!), Bradbury (of course), Pearson, Clarke, Dryfoos, van Vogt, Gold (a delight!), Merril, and a completely surprising tale by Heinlein in collaboration with a lady named Wentz.

A rich, juicy collection; Mr. Pohl is to be congratulated on having done it. Too bad he had to include these previously anthologized items: Pearson's "The Embassy," Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains," van Vogt's "Letter from the Stars" (called "Dear Pen Pal" in its earlier book appearance), and Clarke's "Rescue Party." But even with these duplications, this is an unavoidable "must," particularly at the price.

SPACE ON MY HANDS, by Fredric Brown. Shasta Publishers, Chicago, 1951. 224 *pages,* $2.50

NINE stories by a gent who is one of the very few so-called "humorists" in science fiction whose humor—at least most of it—is funny rather than plain silly.

Previously collected: "Knock" (a good B-plus); "Nothing Sirius" (not one of the best; B-minus); and "Star Mouse" (delightful—a good A-plus for Mitkey Mouse!)

New in book form: "Something Green" (powerful alien-world tale, from which Heinlein borrowed the famous phrase, "The Green Hills of Earth", A); "Crisis, 1999" (I didn't much like this mixture of science fiction, sleuthing and pseudo-hypnotism; C-plus); "Pi in the Sky" (a genuinely brilliant, slap-happy satire on advertising; a solid A); "All Good Bems" (witty but slight, a high-class B-plus); "Daymare" (serious tale involving a hypno-

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tism helmet; A-minus); and last —and best, for my money — "Come and Go Mad" (one of the most superb "we're property" stories ever written).

A fine, high-spirited, fantastical, super-scientifical book for the human-hearted; a thing for padlocked shelves so people won't be swiping it.

TRAVELERS OF SPACE, edited by Martin Greenberg. Gnome Press, New York, 1951. 400 *Pages,* $3.95

THIS anthology has, as the saying has a way of going, *everything*—including 14 stories, of which nine according to my count are worth preserving.

There's a pleasant introduction by Willy Ley: a 13-page "Dictionary of Science Fiction" that contains about 75 definitions (to pun slightly, definitely not a definitive dictionary); and a 16-page full-color section of BEMS (though Mr. G. *insists* they're not any such thing) by Cartier.

In other words, Publisher-Editor Greenberg has given us a really portentous volume here, full of miscellaneous apparati and whammies. The stories I like and think you will include: Keith Bennett's "The Rocketeers Have Shaggy Ears" (Venus adventure); Christopher Youd's "Christmas Tree" (good Moon tale); Ray Bradbury's *completely* out of place "The Shape of Things" (it deals with a baby that was born "through" the wrong dimension and looked like a blue pyramid—a superb story having nothing to do with space travel); Lyle Monroe's "Columbus Was a Dope" (Moon; this delightful snapper of a story is actually a double-snapper, as you will learn when you trace its actual author's name on the copyright page; to give you a clue, the initials are R. A. H.); Hal Clement's "Attitude" (about a planet of S Doradus, very circumstantial, as if Mr. C. had really been there); William Tenn's very pleasant but routine "Ionian Cycle" (all about weird life); Robertson Osborne's "Action on Azura" (splendid!—but already anthologized under the title of "Contact, Inc."); A. E. van Vogt's "The Rull," (it will drive you nuts; very sticky—and very unforgettable—indeed); and Poul Anderson's A-plus-plus "The Double Dyed Villians," (about the Galactic government that keeps the peace solely through corruption — and justly so, too).

The other five tales you may like. Buy the book and find out! I didn't, but then I'm a sort of narrow-minded, combative cove, as everyone knows.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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garden
IN THE VOID

By POUL ANDERSON

An airless, waterless asteroid covered with flourishing green plants? Impossible! Still there it was—tended by the oddest curator!

Illustrated by EMSH

"AN asteroid. A *green* asteroid."

His voice oddly resonant in the metal stillness of the spaceship, he looked through the forward port with an uncertain wonder in him.

There was darkness outside, the great hollow night of space, and a thousand stars flamed cold in the brass frame of the port. The asteroid showed as a tiny pale-green spark that only a trained eye would have seen among those swarming bitter-bright suns. The quality of it was different, a muted reflection of the Belt's weak light instead of naked fire leaping across a universe, and it flickered a little as the irregular stone spun on its axis.

"Green," said Hardesty again,

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the note of puzzlement grown stronger. "I never saw that before."

His wife shoved off from one wall of the cabin, her tall form weightlessly drifting past the glitter of control board to the instruments mounted on the farther side.

"Shall we have a look?" she asked practically.

Hardesty glanced at the meters and performed a mental calculation; one had to be sparing of fuel on a voyage like this.

"Yes, if the velocity isn't too different from ours," he said.

Marian's dark head bent over the telescope and her long, strong fingers spun a wheel, sighting on the speck that flitted out among the constellations. There was a faint sighing of gears above the murmur of air blown through a ventilator. It was quiet out in space—so quiet. Hardesty's pulse was loud in his own ears.

He unclipped a pencil from a pocket of his coverall and scribbled the figures she announced on a pad clamped to the control board. When her readings were done, he took the slide rule from its rack and manipulated it with the easy speed of long practice. His gaunt frame hung in mid-air, one foot hooked through the arm of a recoil chair to keep him in place.

The *Gold Rush* was moving outward from the Sun with a velocity known closely enough from his last astrogational readings. It was a fair approximation to assume that the asteroid's motion was at forty-five degrees to the ship's path and its speed that to be expected of a body orbiting at this distance. Thus, from the observed transverse angular velocity, the separation could be estimated. It would take so much fuel to kill the ship's outward vector—a deceleration of two-point-five Gs should do it in the allowed distance—and then you added ten per cent for maneuvering and landing.

"Uh-huh," he nodded. "It's all right, honey."

Marian swam into her chair, adjusted the webbing, and plugged in her throat mike. She'd be taking the reading while Hardesty piloted the ship, but you needed a comcircuit to talk and hear when the rockets were going.

His mind quit gnawing at the problem of a green asteroid and concentrated on the delicate job of working the ship in. Slowly, his whickering gyros swung the hull around. When the rockets started to roar, it was a thunder voice booming and crashing between the vibrant walls, shivering the teeth in his skull, and weight dragged cruelly at a body grown used to free fall. For a moment

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his eyes hazed, the constellations danced insanely through a suddenly reddened sky, and then his trained reflexes took over and he watched the asteroid swelling in the rearview telescreen.

They shot past it at a distance of ten miles, splashing the great dark with livid flame. Now it rolled in the forward port, and he notched the main switch ahead and felt his tissues groaning. Marian snapped out a string of instrument readings, and gyros whined as Hardesty brought the ship about, changing course, bearing down on the rock. They swung past it in a long curve. When it was centered on the cross-hairs of the rearview screen and could be held there, Hardesty backed down upon it.

A typical piece of space debris, he thought. It was roughly cylindrical, perhaps ten miles long and five thick, but the crags and gashes that scarred its surfaces made it a jumble of blackened stone. Here and there a patch of quartz or mica caught the thin sunlight in a swiftly harsh blink. The greenness was in patches, clustered on such hills and slopes as offered most Sun, but there seemed to be a delicate webbing —of veins?—connecting all those bunches. There were brown and gray and yellow mixed in. Like lichen, he decided, and his mind hearkened back to the cool, mossy rocks of a New England forest and suddenly, almost bitterly, he wished he were there.

The radar screen flickered and danced. Not much level ground, but he had landed on worse places without toppling his ship. Even if he did fail now, it would mean only the nuisance of rigging the derrick to lift her—a bump in that feeble gravity couldn't hurt vessel or crew.

A motor sang above the dull thutter of rockets and the landing tripod slid out around the tubes. Electronic valves glowed, radar-controlled servos adjusting the lengths of the three legs to the sloping, pitted surface. In the sudden ringing stillness, as the rockets went dead, the hull boomed and sagged. Shale gave way beneath one leg, but the servo lengthened it till its foot rested on solidity, and then the whole ship was quiet.

Hardesty shook his head to clear it and looked across at his wife. Her thinly strong features smiled back at him, congratulating him, but no words were needed; they knew each other too well. He unbuckled the webbing and stood erect.

THE vision of the sky was like a blow in the face when they stepped out. He could spend a hundred years in the Belt, thought Hardesty, and its eerie

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unhuman magnificence would be as cold in his heart as the first day he left Earth.

The *Gold Rush* was not a large spaceship—a two-passenger Beltboat with extraction and refining equipment, fuel and supplies enough for a year of cruising—but she loomed over their heads, a squat metal tower against the stars, dully ashine in the pale, chill light. Before them, a harsh raggedness of knife-edged rock swept to a horizon that seemed near enough to touch, the edge of forever lying beyond that wolf-jawed rim of hills. The ground was black, pits and craters and twisted frozen magma, dully lit, shadows like holes of blindness creeping over the rough slope. A tiny Sun, three hundred million miles away, glittered and threw a wash of dim, heatless luminance.

It was quiet, the blank quiet of airlessness and emptiness, the only noise that of the muted scrunch of footsteps carried through the spacesuits, only that and the hot, rapid thud of heart and breath. The sound of his own life was almost deafening in Hardesty's skull, and yet it was the dimmest flicker in a room of night, a tiny frantic fist beating on iron gates of silence.

And overhead wheeled the stars, the million suns of space, fire and ice and the giant sprawl of constellations, the Milky Way a rush of curdled silver, the far, mysterious glow of nebulae, hugeness and loneliness to break a human heart. There went the Great Bear, swinging light-years overhead, and it was not the friendly neighbor of Earth's heaven, but a god striding in flame and darkness, scorning the watchers, enormous and beautiful and cruel. The others followed, and the stars that Earth never sees threw their signals flashing and flashing across the years and the unthinkable distances, and no man knew what they were calling.

Hardesty drew a deep breath and looked over to Marian. The declining Sun flared off her space armor; a sheen on the helmet veiled her face from him. The armor depersonalized her and the voice over the radio was a metallic rattle. It was as if a robot stood at his side.

He threw off the oppression of solitude and forced a calm into his voice: "Come on, let's take a look at one of those green patches before sunset."

"I think there's one over that way." She pointed north with a gauntleted hand.

Hardesty had already located the asteroid's pole star. He noted the position of the other constellations and set off after her. Ten years' experience had taught him

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how easy it was to get lost in such a jungle of stone, and their tanks only held air for a few hours.

It was ghostly, bounding along in utter silence, almost weightless, between the high, dead crags and under the sharp stars. In all his time out here, Hardesty had not lost the eeriness of it. And yet Earth was blurring in his memory, green fields and tall trees and the feel of an actual wind, a low old house among a thousand shouting autumn colors, beat of wings across heaven—he couldn't always conjure up the images. A blaze of naked stars would rise between.

Well, maybe here, maybe somewhere else, this trip or next, we'll make the big strike. Then we'll go home.

It was the great chimera. For every man who reached it, a hundred broke their hearts or left their withered corpses on some unknown frozen rock.

Hardesty had been one of the luckiest. He'd made enough once to buy his own ship, and since that time enough to pay his costs and even save a little money. And he'd met one of the Belt's few women in an office on Ceres, and married her and made her his partner.

How would Marian look at Earth? She'd never seen it. She'd been born on Mars.

The Sun sloped low as the asteroid spun on its hurried, timeless way. Wan light glimmered off Marian's armor as she topped a high ridge, pinning her against darkness and the scornful stars. Her voice was a sudden excited gasp in his earphones:

"Jim! Jim, come quick!"

He bunched his muscles and reached her side in a soaring bound, floating down and twirling a little like a dead autumn leaf. (*Autumn, a maple scarlet against October smoke, and a leaf scrittling across the sidewalk!*) Together they looked down the crazily tilted sheet of basalt to the seamed ledge jutting out against Orion.

The green was there. In the airlessness, it was as sharp and clear as if it touched his helmet. Leathery domes, coiling vines, thick strong leaves—

He breathed the word as if it were something holy: "Life."

"Life? But it's not possible, Jim. No asteroid has life."

His answer was flat, and a sudden coldness tingled in his hands. "This one does."

HE strode across the black slabs in the seven-league boots of Belt gravity. The Sun hung between two pinnacles, throwing a horned shadow across the acre of green. Hardesty knelt at the boundary of the patch and

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grasped one of the cactuslike leaves.

It seemed almost to shrink, and in the vague tricky light he thought that a pulse ran from it, through the webbing of vines, and out of sight along the filaments that reached from this ledge. He drew back his hand and squatted there, staring. Marian came up and stood against his side.

"I—" Her voice was low now, trembling faintly. "I don't know whether to—to be glad or interested or—frightened, Jim."

His long-jawed face slid into the expressionlessness of uncertainty. "I know. We've gotten so used to thinking of the Belt as inorganic that—well, our enemies have been cold and vacuum and distance, impersonal forces. We really don't know how to face something that could be actively hostile. And yet, that life could exist and evolve here is a wonderful feeling." He looked up to the stars as if throwing them a challenge.

"This can't hurt us. Plants. You don't think there could be —monsters here?"

"I wouldn't mind a good hot-breathed dragon. But germs? I suppose I'm being an old woman. But you know what they say about *bold* spacemen never becoming *old* spacemen. They don't live that long."

"How can any life exist here?

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No water, no air, nothing—"

"I don't know. It's obviously not terrestrial-type life, though I'm pretty sure it's protoplasmic. It's adapted to these conditions, that's all."

Decision brought him erect again. "I suppose we should try to study this out, make analyses and so on, but we have neither the training nor the equipment to do so. We'll take some pictures, and get an accurate orbit for this pebble, and report the whole matter to Ceres. And we'll scout around for minerals as usual, avoiding these green patches. Our work is risky enough without taking even a tiny extra chance."

"You're right." Marian stood looking at the plants. They were small and grotesquely ugly, but—

"A garden," she whispered. "A little garden, blooming out here on the edge of nothing."

"Come on," said Hardesty. "Let's get back to the ship."

THE Sun sank under the farther rocks and night was abruptly on them. Their flashlights cast dull puddles of yellow haze on the ground, where elsewhere there was a sea of black under the streaming stars. The sky's light picked out the higher crags, etching them frost-gray against the dark, but the humans stumbled in shadow, floating to the ground to continue their careful low-gravity shuffle back toward the ship.

"I can't forget it," said Marian. "Those plants, blooming out here without air or heat or water—do you think that comets hover above them, Jim? Do you think their pollen is stardust?"

"Don't get poetic," he grunted.

In spite of their stellar observations, they had trouble locating the ship, approaching it finally from the other side. Thus they had walked around the massive tripod before they saw the figure waiting in front of the gangway.

Hardesty thought with a flash of disappointment that some other prospector had beaten them

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to it. He had come far out of the usual lanes, without revealing his course to anyone, to avoid just that; matching velocities and landing was so expensive that, by law, the first man to set down on a new rock held all mining rights. Then, as he looked closer—

The space armor was awkward and bulky, a model which had been obsolete long before Hardesty left Earth, and its metal was patched and battered. There was no air-tank. A thick-leafed vine coiled around the square old-fashioned helmet, across the shoulders and down the back, like ivy on an ancient university building. Hardesty saw with a jolting shock that a tendril ran into the helmet, sealed by a clumsy weld, and that tiny rootlets veined the face inside and was tangled in among the man's beard.

The—man?

Marian's stifled scream was loud in his earphones; she clutched at Hardesty's arm and they skipped back together. A dead man, a corpse, a revenant puppet of plants which grew where no life could be—

"Who are you? *What* are you?"

The other took a floating stride toward them. His face was hooded in darkness; they could barely see the glitter of starlight in his sunken eyes. Hardesty stood waiting, braced to meet the thing that neared him. The ship behind seemed infinitely remote.

Metal hands clasped Hardesty's shoulders and the square helmet leaned forward to ring faintly against his own. That close, the miner could see the shaggy head inside, still veiled with shadow—a shattered gravestone of a face with ivy creeping over it and reaching into the cracks. He fought down an impulse to retch.

The voice that came was dim and slow: "You—from Earth?"

"Yes and no. Who are you, man? What is that you're wearing?" Hardesty's mouth was dry.

"My name? It's—I am the gardener." The stranger shook his big head, and the cactus leaves on his helmet rustled where there was never a wind to stir them. "No, wait. Yes, they called me, my name, yes . . . Hans Gronauer." A throbbing chuckle. "But that was long ago. Now I am the gardener."

"You mean you were shipwrecked?"

"Yes. How long ago? There are not years here. I think it was twenty Earth years ago. That is a guess. It could be more." The newcomer brushed a gauntleted hand over his faceplate, a strangely human gesture, as if he were trying to rub his weary eyes. "You will excuse. It is long since I talked. And my—my talker?—

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Yes, radio. My radio was broken in the crash. I must talk this way."

"By helmet conduction? Yeah, sure. But—my God, man! That plant growing—growing on you like that—"

The tiny gleam of teeth in the beard, the downcast eyes, it was a shy smile. "The plant gives air. So."

"So—*oh!*" Marian had heard the words over her husband's set. "Jim, of course, the plants release oxygen and he's used them —Twenty years, Jim!"

Turning his face, he saw the cold starlight gleam on her tear-streaked cheeks, and there was a sudden wrench of pity in his own heart.

Twenty years! Twenty years alone in naked space!

"Come into the ship," he said urgently. He didn't think he could stand out here on twisted black stone with a million frozen suns jeering at him. "Come into the ship, man, and get some food. Twenty years! My God!"

"No." Gronauer didn't shake his head, for that human gesture seemed forgotten, but he lowered his eyes. "No. Not yet, please."

"But—"

"The garden would not like it. Not yet."

"The garden?"

"World. We—don't dare. Not till we know. It has been so long."

"I think I see." It was Marian again; Hardesty had never stopped wondering at the cool quickness of her mind. She wasn't pretty, he supposed, but even on Earth he couldn't have had a better wife. "He's adapted in some odd way, or thinks he may have. He's not sure he can stand conditions inside our ship."

"Yes. The plant might die." Gronauer's faded voice held a sudden eagerness. His vocabulary was coming back to him in a rush. "I must think this out. Come with me and let us investigate the problem."

"Come where?"

"My home. It is safe for you. But—yes, bring food."

"You haven't eaten?"

"The garden feeds me. But for you it may not be safe—be safe for you yet. Come quick. Please."

"All right, if it isn't far. We have to watch our air supply, you know."

"The plants give air."

At the thought of tendrils around his head and roots going into him, Hardesty shivered. "No!"

"I mean air is in my house. You can breathe there. It is not far from here."

"Very well." Hardesty disengaged himself from Gronauer and thus from auditory contact. "Marian, fetch some canned stuff. And put my gun into a

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pocket. It's in the toolbox."

"Gun, Jim?"

"Yeah." His voice was a little ragged. "Never thought I'd need it, but let's not take chances. I'm not leaving you alone with him, either. I'm pretty sure he's harmless, but you can't tell. Twenty years! He's not acting like a normal human being. But who the hell would after living here like that for so long? Yes, I want the gun."

Wordlessly, she stepped up the gangway and disappeared into the airlock. Gronauer stood waiting, making no further attempt at conversation, and Hardesty was satisfied to keep it that way.

The wonder of his discovery was lost in worried calculation. They could certainly not refuse to take Gronauer with them when they left, but his extra mass and the supplies he would need could upset the whole cruise. There wasn't any outpost to take him to within some scores of megamiles. So unless a decent lode of fissionable ores was found soon, he represented a heavy financial loss. Briefly Hardesty wondered if he could leave Gronauer to be picked up by a government rescue ship. After all, scientists would want to investigate this place . . . But it'd make Hardesty an outcast, being known to have abandoned a shipwrecked spaceman. And he'd have to live with himself. No, he'd have to take Gronauer back, whatever it cost.

All he could do was hope that there was a lode on this asteroid. Gronauer would know about that.

Marian came back, loaded with a sack of cans which Hardesty slung over one shoulder. Gronauer set off at once.

The path was dark, there under the ghostly arch of the Milky Way, but he picked his way with effortless speed. It didn't seem to occur to him that the others were having trouble keeping up. Hardesty cursed and stumbled. He noticed that there was a leathery bladder on the castaway's back, apparently part of the vine system. It glowed with the dimmest of red light. Heat?

After a mile or two of bare stone, they entered a patch of growth that seemed to stretch indefinitely far on every side. The frailer vines and leaves shrank aside from the human feet, and subliminally faint pulses rippled through the garden and over the edge of the little world. Hardesty estimated that they came, in all, some five miles from the *Gold Rush* before reaching the other spaceship.

It was a smashed ruin. Only the central part of the hull seemed intact, and that had been patched and welded. It lay in a small box canyon, against the low bluff at the farther end. The metal ribs

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and the great broken tubes were scattered around it like raven-picked bones. And everywhere the steel was covered by green growth.

Here the plants had become a thicket, vines swarming over the cliffs and wrapped about the gaunt crags, leaves and tendrils and looming fluted columns hiding the rock in a ghost-gray sea, stirring without wind and rustling without sound under the chill stars. Gronauer's cabin was smothered in the dripping life. Hardesty could not suppress a shudder as the leaves framing the airlock brushed him.

Within the chamber there was a stifling darkness until Gronauer opened the inner door, and then feeble light shone. It was lost again as frost condensed on the space-chilled helmets. Hardesty and Marian helped each other out of their armor, careful not to touch it with bare hands, and followed Gronauer into the room beyond.

The miner's first glance was for the castaway, now that he had removed his ivy-covered, battered old armor. His hair and beard were streaked with gray, and he smelled unwashed, though there was no grime on him. It was the face that held Hardesty's gaze, the cruelly smashed face which had healed into lumps of scar tissue. It was pockmarked on cheeks and forehead, where he had gently pulled out the roots of the plant that still clung to his spacesuit. But the eyes were gentle, the mutilated lips curved in a timid smile, and he stood aside for his guests.

The cabin was small, almost unfurnished, yet crowded. It was cold and the air had a musty reek. Plants covered walls and ceiling, made a springy carpeting underfoot, rustled and shivered as the humans walked across them. There were a lot of the red bladders twined into the leafage, and light came from countless tiny—berries?—things which glowed a dull amber in the gray-green tangle.

"It is strange to you, I suppose," said Gronauer apologetically. "But it keeps me alive."

Hardesty touched a bladder. It was warm under his hand. Yes, the plants heated the room and aired it and illuminated it and fed the owner. He had a sudden dark wonder as to just who owned whom.

"It's like a dream," whispered Marian. The unspoken thought ran on: *A nightmare. A surrealist's delirium.* "Have you had this long, Mr. Gronauer?"

"Yes. At first I ate the garden, but then I saw that, that way, one of us must kill the other, and if I killed it there would be no food for me. So I made friends

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instead, and bit by bit the garden learned my needs and gave them to me."

As if exhausted by speech, Gronauer's rusty voice faded out and he answered no more questions. Hardesty repressed a revulsion. After all, this was a wonderful example of human ingenuity, the greatest Robinson Crusoe story in the universe, and certainly the plants were harmless. But he took out cans and can opener with the eagerness of a man clutching at familiarity in a strange land.

"Shall we eat?" he suggested.

Gronauer shook his head, smiling, when they offered him Bionate and one of their few, cherished cans of beer. "I—have no taste for it," he said. "It might even be dangerous. I will feed."

Carefully, he broke off one of the fleshy cactuslike leaves and chewed on it. He held a trailing vine to his face, and Marian looked away as the tendrils stirred hungrily and slid into the pocks. At least, thought Hardesty a little sickly, the plants did everything for him. Everything except furnish human companionship—and it didn't seem as if Gronauer needed that any more.

Not after twenty years.

IT was surprising how much difference a full stomach made. Hardesty hadn't really been aware of his own hunger till it was gone and strength was flowing back into his bloodstream. He sat down almost casually on a vine-begrown chair—there was a mossy plant intertwined, making a faintly warm cushion—and began to draw Gronauer out in talk. That wasn't easy; the castaway was too shy to do more than mumble answers while staring at his feet, but piece by piece the story was revealed. It was, in reality, quite simple.

Gronauer had been only twenty or so when he left his native Germany for the Asteroid Belt. That was thirty years ago, when the mineral riches of the flying mountains had just lately come to the attention of an Earth increasingly starved for fissionable ores, and the great companies were outfitting expeditions. A ship which cruised among the scattered worldlets, refining the substances it located, could return in a year or two to one of the asteroid cities with a cargo worth a good many millions of dollars.

Hard, dangerous, and profitable work has always commanded high wages, and no few of the prospectors, Gronauer among them, had soon been able to buy their own ships and go out as independent operators.

He'd had a partner — he couldn't remember the man's

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name now—and they'd traveled and dug together for about five years. As the most accessible asteroids became worked out, the custom of not revealing one's destination grew up. That way, if you found a rich group of planetoids, you could make several trips without competition—but, of course, if you met with an accident there could be no rescue. Without more powerful radio equipment than a Beltboat could carry, there was no way to get help.

Gronauer had gone north of the ecliptic plane, looking for one of the many groups which traveled in crazily tilted orbits. He'd found this green world and come wonderingly in for a landing. But the asteroid had a satellite, a meteor which had suddenly flashed over the horizon and crashed through the ship's engines and sent it hurtling to its death.

The other man was killed. Gronauer had escaped with broken bones and a smashed face. He'd lain near extinction for a timeless age; only the fact that the weak gravity made no demands on his body had saved him. After that, the only thing to do was to survive somehow and hope that another prospector would happen by. That could be within a year or never. It was safest to assume that he would leave his bones here.

One man could live off the ship's food stores perhaps two years. But there was life, the plants, food. Gronauer had had no means of testing for poison except his own metabolism. A few times he got sick but he learned what he could safely eat. Certain of the fleshy cactus growths were nourishing.

He harvested all of them within five miles or so of his ship. After a few days—or weeks, or months; he lost track—he'd gone out after more, and found that everything was dead in the area which he had exploited. And when he cut some plants elsewhere and ate them, he nearly died again.

GRONAUER was no biologist, but a spaceman generally picked up a good knowledge of science and so he had heard of symbiosis. It was clear that the plants were in some way interdependent, that each species was necessary to the survival of the whole. And in some dim way they had sensed the enemy among them and reacted with deadly swiftness. Any type he tried to eat would soon become poisonous to him. Perhaps the garden would try something still more devastating. An unnoticed root, growing between two plates of the wrecked ship that housed him, could split it open and let out

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the air in a great and fatal rush.

With a quiet, methodical courage that Hardesty had to admire, he had given himself the urgent job of studying the symbiosis. He had no formal education in biology and almost no scientific instruments; most of his conclusions were guesswork from the sketchiest data. But given a year or two of patient slogging, and a good mind driven by a peasant's deep, strong will to live, one could accomplish more than Earth's cold intellectuals would ever admit.

He puzzled it out, observing and thinking in the huge loneliness of his world. The life here was protoplasmic, chemically similar to his own. It even seemed to involve photosynthesis of some kind.

The tough skin of the "cactoids" admitted ultraviolet light —intense in airless space, even this far from the Sun—while preventing the loss of water by evaporation. Instead, the water circulated through vine-systems to other species that used it in their own life-processes, and carried organic compounds manufactured by various types of plants to the symbiotic whole. The water was obtained from gypsum and other minerals by certain roots which added alcohol to prevent its freezing. Even so, the bitter temperatures would long ago have turned it to ice, except that it circulated through the red bladders and these heated it with energy derived from fermentation or very slow combustion. The oxygen for that could also be cracked from mineral compounds beneath the surface.

Cross-fertilization and the subsequent spread of life over the whole asteroid depended on specialized vines. There even seemed to be hearts for this vascular system, slowly pulsing lumps of tissue scattered through the garden. A vast and unimaginably intricate network, each type fulfilling one of the many functions needed to maintain the whole in existence—

A trained biologist might well have needed as much time as Gronauer to puzzle out the life cycle.

"I still wonder if solar energy is enough to keep such a system going," said Hardesty. "It takes a lot to break up minerals, you know, even if the symbiosis manufactures catalysts."

"We are as far from the Sun as we ever get," answered Gronauer patiently. "The orbit is very—yes, very eccentric. I think the period is about seven years. At least we have three times come, I think, within the orbit of Venus while I was here. It gets hot then, special plants grow up to protect the others, and energy

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is stored chemically against the long cold which follows."

"I see. And with this highly tilted orbit, the asteroid hasn't been discovered even when it was that close to Earth."

The poor guy! Think of him sitting here, watching the Sun grow and blaze, watching Earth swell to a blue brilliance and her moon visible beside her, and still alone, still forever alone.

"How did life evolve here?" wondered Marian. "You need air and oceans for that, and this asteroid has been dead rock since the beginning of time."

Hardesty shrugged. "We'll probably never know, but I can make a guess. On some other world, maybe the world of another star, air and water disappeared slowly enough for life to adapt. Certain spores of that life were lifted on the last wisps of atmosphere up to where light pressure could drive them from that solar system. The old Arrhenius theory. They survived the trip. There were a lot of spore-clumps landing on many worlds, but this might be the only one in our system that had the conditions they needed for growth. Maybe not — the spores could be the ancestors of all life on our planets, but I doubt it. Too completely alien."

It was an eldritch thought, that the garden had been seeded from across that gulf of space, that it was the child of a world millions of years in its grave, and that—perhaps, in the remote future, when all the planets were airless husks, gardens like this would bloom as the last defiance of the sunless night. He shivered in the chill must of the room.

"Go on," he said. "Tell us what you did."

Gronauer looked at him with gentle, frightened eyes.

"Don't be shy," said Marian softly. "It is a great and wonderful thing you've done. You make me proud to be human."

"Human?" The short laugh was jarring. A vague rustling went among the leaves. "I am—human?" After a moment, looking away: "Please to excuse. I have not been used to talking so much. I will try."

THE words stumbled out, awkward, toneless, the words of a man who had begun by speaking German, changed to the English of the spaceways, and then not spoken at all except for the shadowy half-language of the garden. Hardesty had to fill in gaps; the castaway could only hint at a reality too far from human experience for communication—but the outline grew.

It had been plain that the symbiosis was highly adaptable. It probably had to be, to survive

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the extremes of the asteroid's wildly swooping orbit. Gronauer thought, too, that the impact of cosmic rays, unshielded by atmosphere, induced a hugh mutation rate; somehow, the garden weeded out unfavorable mutations and took those it could use. The pattern was not a rigid thing. It was constantly evolving.

There even seemed to be a primitive brain somewhere. Not a human-type brain—there probably wasn't a nervous system as Earth knew it—but *something* had to control that change. Something *had* altered the garden's metabolism and poisoned those leaves that the stranger ate.

Probably it had tried various compounds from the beginning of Gronauer's attacks, until it hit on this one. The man had harvested the deadly leaves and disposed of them with a terrible feeling of being watched. But that was ridiculous—or was it? Was not the whole impossibly living world against him, ringing him in and waiting for him to die?

After a few weeks he ate again, experimentally, and was not sick. He'd fooled the garden. Only it would keep on trying to kill him, and he would never know when it had made a successful attempt until too late. His one long-range chance of survival lay in making peace with the garden; and that could only be done by proving his potential usefulness to it.

Digging around a patch of growth, he discovered that certain thick roots went deep into the hard rock. Those must be for extracting buried minerals. Protoplasm required carbon and oxygen, among other things, and most likely the source of the former element was the various carbonates.

Gronauer went to an area where the plants had not yet penetrated and began to dig. His miner's eye and brain were more effective than the chance gropings of the blind roots, and it was slow work for them, forcing their way into solid rock.

Before long, he had a small heap of assorted carbonates. He macerated them and laid them beside one of the big roots. A few hours later, tendrils had grown around his offering and most of it was being absorbed. Limestone was a favorite, he saw, while iron compounds were hardly touched. He went after more limestone. And there were other elements they must need—sulfates would be especially valuable—and with the tiny atomic heater that remained to him, he could concentrate nitrates.

It took time for the garden to understand. There probably was no conscious mind reasoning out what Gronauer wanted; there was simply a high mutation rate and

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a completely integrated ecology. By supplying minerals, by loosening rock about new roots, by guiding tendrils in their direction of growth, the man performed a service, and the energy saved the whole system could go into proliferation—some of which would be new, "experimental" forms.

WITHIN a few months, there were pale leaves which seemed to be mostly protein. Gronauer harvested and ate them. Presently there were no more such leaves. They had apparently not fulfilled a real function, and the symbiosis had cut them off. Gronauer stopped working for the garden. He waited, and the slow weeks passed, and his supplies from Earth got horribly short. If he had guessed wrong—

No. The flesh-leaves budded out again. Gronauer rewarded the garden with a heap of limestone and copperas. Thereafter the leaves stayed. Whether it was blind natural selection within the framework of symbiosis, or whether there really was some dim brain capable of learned reflexes, the garden adapted to the new fact that flesh-leaves meant free minerals.

"After that," said Gronauer simply, "we were friends. The problem was only to com—communicate our needs to each other."

He needed green food to prevent scurvy. An experimental taste made him ill, and again he withheld his services. Thereafter the garden produced more edible green leaves than it needed for itself, and he gathered the surplus.

It was to his advantage to have the garden change rapidly, so that new possibilities would arise. He rewarded each discovered mutation with an extra mineral ration; if it turned out to be useful, he was lavish in his payments. Thus, over the years, he attained a remarkably balanced diet.

Meanwhile, the plants had grown back around his ship, and he transplanted vines inside. They died, and he tried again, and still again, until he struck a variety that would endure the conditions he needed. They gave light and heat to replace his failing generator, and proved to be much more efficient producers of free oxygen than the tanks of Martian swordgrass which was standard on spaceships.

He had been recovering water by the usual condensing methods, replacing losses by baking gypsum, but his new plants "learned" to give him as much alcohol-free water as he wanted. He could have had the alcohol, too, but he didn't like to drink alone. And surely few men had ever been as lonely as he.

"And all the time," said Gro-

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nauer, "I was trying other things, learning more about the symbiosis. After a few years I got the —the feel of it. I have not the scientific words to describe, but I can understand in my own way what goes on. I can look at a patch of growth and tell what it needs. I can look at a mutant form and after a while know what it may do. By selecting new strains for several generations, I can create a species which will fit well into the symbiosis. It was thus I made the light-berries, for my own use, and roots which can use ferric carbonate—the symbiosis could not handle that before, and limestone was getting short. And other things."

"The — well, your spacesuit? The air plant on it?" Hardesty felt embarassed at mentioning that.

"My air compressing pump was going to wear out soon, I knew that, and by then it was more natural for me to work with the plants rather than dead machinery. The plants growing on my helmet, they give heat and light and free the oxygen out of my own breath. They live from my bloodstream. It is not much they need and they give me vitamins in return. Their rootlets entered my skin quite painlessly.

"I have many kinds of food-plants now, with new tastes. You would like them, I think, but they are probably different from what you are used to. Go slow at first, eat only a little of the native food for a year, or however long your supplies last."

Hardesty and Marian did not stop then to consider Gronauer's odd phrasing of the invitation. It wouldn't have meant much to them; in twenty years of solitude, anyone would develop a curious turn of speech.

Gronauer shuffled over to a desk, opened a drawer and took out an old logbook. Routine entries stopped with the shipwreck; what followed was page after page of fine script and painstakingly drawn illustrations.

"Here are my notes," he said with a humble pride. "I have described and pictured everything. It is all that you need to know."

Marian skimmed through it, and her thin intense features lit with a genuine glow.

"It's wonderful, Mr. Gronauer," she said after a moment. "This marks some kind of epoch in biology, you know. Your name will go down in history."

"Um, yes." Hardesty forced himself back to the practical side of things. "Tell me, though, how's this world for radioactives? Any good deposits?"

"A few deposits, but not worth working unless they have changed refining machinery a lot since my time."

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"They haven't." The spaceman sighed. "Well, it was just a thought. We might as well blast off, then. Our ship's quarters are rather cramped, Gronauer, but we'll fix up the best we can for you."

"For me?" The soft eyes widened.

"Of course. Did you think we'd leave you behind?"

Gronauer shook his gray-maned head. "But I cannot go. I have to stay here. I am the gardener, you see."

HARDESTY took a restless turn about the cabin. His feet fell so lightly in the low gravity that it was soundless; he drifted ghost-fashion between the cluttered instruments and controls of the Beltboat.

"I don't know what to do," he said. "We can't take him along. Imagine having a raving lunatic crowded in here with us for months. But, damn it, we can't abandon him either."

"We won't be abandoning him," said Marian. "No one can say the situation is our fault. We'll let the government know, and he'll be all right till they send a ship for him."

"Even so, it's the principle of the thing." He stared out the port, at the hugeness of night and frosty stars beyond, barren rock and mute loneliness, and the primal terror of it struck deep into him. "Leaving a man alone in *that!*"

"He's done all right for twenty years, dear. He can last one more. After that, it'll be up to the official rescue party. We can suggest that they take a psychiatrist along."

"You had no luck persuading him?"

"None at all. I tried every day. I went over to his place while you were exploring the asteroid and talked to him." Wistfulness tinged her voice. "I told him about mankind and about Earth and summer moons and smoky hills in autumn, the way we've always dreamed it—I've never seen Earth, Jim, except in pictures, but somehow it's more real to me than all this empty universe. He isn't interested. I had to quit when he started getting angry."

Hardesty went over and kissed her. "You're a good kid," he murmured. "Some day, some day *soon,* we're going home to Earth. No more space for us. It'll be roses growing over a house by the seaside." His fists clenched impotently. "If only there'd been a strike right here on this damned lump! But I hunted everywhere. Not a thing worth digging out. Gronauer told the truth."

"Why should he have lied to us?"

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"I don't know, except that he isn't normal any more. He doesn't react like a human being, even like a human who's been alone that long. Those plants have done something to him." Decision hardened Hardesty's lean face. "Well, he doesn't get many more chances to come along. We're not hanging around here another twenty-four hours. The sooner off, the sooner we'll find that lode and go home to Earth."

"Yes, I suppose so." Marian turned back toward the microscopic galley. "He's coming over for dinner, you know. I talked him into that much, at least."

"Well, I suppose there's no harm in it. Any special motive other than hospitality?"

"Oh, we'll make it as bright and cheerful as we can. Homelike. It may change his mind."

"I doubt that. But we'll have done our best."

Hardesty glanced out the port again. The Sun was rising, a tiny brilliant disc winged with the zodiacal light. Its thin radiance crept over blackened lava and tumbled granite, seeming only to add to the ruinous desolation.

MARIAN busied herself, getting the small luxuries they had saved for festive occasions out of the freezer, filling the ship with an aroma that made her husband lick his lips and grin. She hummed as she worked, and somehow the table she set was like a bit of Earth—the gleam of plate and silver, a centerpiece of flame-red swordgrass blooms, even the tiny porcelain dachshund that was their mascot.

"We're putting on the dog," she explained solemnly. "Now you go dress, Jim."

He put on clean dungarees, knotted his one and atrocious tie, and slicked back his sandy hair. Marian had put on a print dress and dainty slippers; she suddenly looked pathetically young. Hardesty wished with irritation that there was no guest coming, that this might be for the two of them alone. Briefly, he knew that they'd never really fit in on Earth, for something of the high, cold solitude had entered them and they were too self-sufficient and aloof.

But that was a well-known psychological phenomenon. It was one reason why few prospectors went back till they'd made their pile and could live independently of society. Another was the difficulty, these days, of getting any kind of decent job on Earth.

It's not mankind we're going back to. We'll have neighbors, but our intimacy has become something that will never really let anyone else know us. It's Earth we want, Earth and clean winds and the tall trees above,

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Sun and sea and sky. We want an environment that is home instead of deadly foe. We want the heritage of our race's evolution.

The stars wheeled overhead, grand and lonely—he'd miss the sky of space now and then; he'd wonder at the dimness of constellations—but there'd be summer around him, a whisper of leaves, the chirp of crickets and a firefly bobbing through the warm and sleepy dark. No more metal, no more tanked air and canned food and armored life — they would have come to their kingdom.

Harsh sunlight gleamed off the figure that approached. Gronauer. Hardesty sighed, pumped out the airlock and opened its outer valve. When he closed that again and opened the inner one, a breath of searing cold eddied from the figure which stood there.

Gronauer climbed out of his suit and looked timidly around him. He had dressed in an old coverall given him by Marian. It didn't fit well and he was obviously uncomfortable in it. For a moment, he shrank from his host's welcome.

"It is — warm in here," he mumbled.

"Sorry. Want me to lower the thermostat?"

"No, please not to bother, I will get used to it. You were good to ask me." Gronauer edged nervously into the cabin.

"Sit down. Dinner will be ready in a minute."

"I cannot stay too long." The stooped gray form placed itself on the edge of a recoil chair, as if ready to leap from sudden menace. "In here I am cut off. The garden might need me and I would not know."

"Isn't that the case in your own cabin?"

"No, no. There are roots growing through the plates. My children inside are part of the whole system. I have sealed around the roots so air does not get out, but the garden can still call me." The words were jerky, stammering a little, and the eyes were never still.

"I noticed that every disturbance seemed to set up vibrations in the plants. Is that how they—communicate?"

"Yes. Formerly, before I came, those were just special stimuli causing certain stereotyped reactions. Like if a plant was hurt or killed by a rockfall, the vibrations triggered a reaction elsewhere, seeds were carried to the spot, a new plant was started. But after all these years, I can —read? understand?—more. Often I know just what is wrong even before I go there. By sending my own pulses out, I can usually cause to be done whatever must be done, even without going

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there to do the work myself."

"A sort of nervous system, then." Hardesty rubbed his chin. "And now you've become its brain." The thought was unpleasant, somehow.

Gronauer leaned forward eagerly. "And the eyes and hands, too. Many of the old functions have died out because I do it quicker and better, so the garden needs me. It would probably die without me. That is why I cannot go with you."

"Soup's on," called Marian gaily.

IT was mostly synthetics and dehydrates, but you wouldn't have known it, for she was an inspired cook. Hardesty dug in eagerly. Gronauer, though, only picked unhappily at his share.

"I hope you like it, Mr. Gronauer," said Marian, a little stiffly.

His twisted face tried to smile an apology. "I am not used to such fare for a long time. Garden food tastes different. It *feels* different." He waved a hand inarticulately. "How shall I make clear? It is that *you* eat things you have no kinship with; you kill them and devour them without any emotion. But *I* am nourished by something of which I am a part."

Wryly, Hardesty's mind wandered off on the subject of autophagy. Given perfect surgical tools, shockless and bloodless amputation, how long could a man survive by eating parts of himself?

"At first I wanted to go back." Gronauer's tongue seemed loosened all at once. Perhaps the beer he was not used to had taken hold already. "It is strange to remember how lonely I was—oh, for years I wept because there was no one and nothing else. But now I see that it is you who are lonely, each of you alone in a world of dead metal, shouting at someone else you cannot even be sure exists, cannot be sure what he is thinking of you or even if he is thinking at all."

His grin was rather terrible. "How do you know you are not the only consciousness in a world of robots? Alone, alone, and you go to your grave and that is the end. But I belong. I *feel* the other life. It is part of me and I am part of it. My life has meaning and beauty—my life, married to other sensitive life, all of us together against the void. No, no, I cannot go back to Earth!"

He lapsed into stillness, sat looking out of the port at the cruel brilliance of stars, and did not answer their remarks. Hardesty traded an exasperated look with Marian.

"We're leaving, you know, Gronauer," he said after they had

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finished and were sitting in the recoil chairs again. "This is your last chance to come with us."

The gray, scarred head shook violently, so that the long hair swirled about the eyes.

"I suppose you'll make out all right," said Hardesty. "We'll plot an orbit that'll get us to the nearest radio station — I think that's Pallas right now—as soon as possible, and from there we can relay word to Ceres. It won't be many months before a government ship comes for you."

Gronauer shrank back and breath hissed between his teeth.

"What then?" he gasped. "What will they do?"

Despite himself, Hardesty was surprised at the violence of the reaction.

"Why, you have a legal right to stay here if you want, of course." *Unless the psychiatrists decide you're insane,* his mind added grimly. "But there'll be scientists to study your garden and your discoveries. There'll be supplies and companionship —"

"I do not want it!" Gronauer stood up, trembling. "I have all I want. I am the gardener. Is that not enough? Do not tell them I am here. They would come and hurt the garden."

"Under the law, I can't abandon you. It's all right to leave you, I guess, seeing that that's what you want, but not reporting a shipwrecked spaceman? I could get in trouble for that."

"Who would know?" interjected Marian. She threw a wink at her husband over Gronauer's shoulder. *Soothe him, humor him till we're away from here.* "If you wish, of course we'll keep your secret. It's your right to stay here alone if you really want to."

"I want. I want!"

"But think, Mr. Gronauer." She smiled at him warmly. "Think of what that will mean. You're getting old. You can't live forever. You'll die here and perhaps no one will discover this asteroid for centuries, or perhaps never. The garden will die without a human to attend it. If you let the scientists come, they'd preserve it as a natural wonder even when you were gone."

"They would not understand." His voice was harsh and hostile. "The gardener must be part of the garden. He must grow into it, make it his life. Their scientific tending would not be enough."

I think, said Hardesty's mind, *that the old man is right. This is more than a mechanical set of duties to be performed. You can't replace a human brain with an electronic computer, even the best and latest model, even one which actually thinks. You can't replace the gardener with a paid attendant. Even if anyone would consent to live here alone, two or*

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three years at a time, for any wages. Could you be hired to let roots tap your bloodstream?

"Then that's that," he said aloud, coldly. "The garden will last your lifetime, undisturbed."

ORION wheeled mightily overhead, a glitter of frozen fire against an infinite clear dark. Gronauer sat still. There were trickles of sweat on his face, and he was breathing heavily.

Marian tried to break the embarrassed silence: "It has been a great privilege to know you, Mr. Gronauer. And the garden. Was there anybody you once knew? Any message, perhaps?"

"No," he said abstractedly. "No one. Not any more."

After another minute, his eyes lifted to theirs with a kind of entreaty.

"I have thought of this before," he blurted. "I am, as you say, old. There should be a race of human gardeners here, to carry on. The garden is still growing, still evolving. It needs men, and it gives them rewards you cannot now imagine. Would—would you think of staying here yourselves, having children here, too?"

The thought was so grotesque that Hardesty had to laugh, a harsh sound jarring against the drumhead of tense silence. It seemed to strike Marian differently.

"Children," she repeated. "Yes, Jim, we have to get back to Earth soon, while we can still be young with our kids."

"You could have them now," said Gronauer. "Here."

"No. It isn't fair to a child to raise it anywhere but on Earth. It isn't right to grow up in metal." There was something haunted in her voice. "I know. It happened to me."

"A child growing up here—" The castaway's words trailed off. He drew a long breath. "Would you come with me?" he asked. "There is something I would like to show you. It will change your outlook on all this. You will at least see why I want to stay here alone."

"What's that?" Despite himself, Hardesty felt a resurgence of interest.

Damn it, the asteroid *was* unique.

"I cannot explain in words. You will have to see. It is not so far to go."

"Well—"

"It is the last gift I can give you."

"Certainly we'll come," said Marian. "We'll be glad to, won't we, Jim?"

"Sure," he said worriedly. He went to the spacesuit locker and opened it. "We'd better hurry, then. It'll be sunset again pretty quick."

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"We will be following the Sun," said Gronauer. He lumbered over to his own suit where it stood in the airlock. Briefly, his gnarled hands stroked the gray-green vines that draped it—an odd, wistful caress.

Hardesty peeled off shirt and pants, revealing the insulated one-piece undergarment which served as padding below his armor. Marian exchanged her dress for a similar outfit. It looked well on her slim figure. Hardesty smiled as he helped her into her suit.

Gronauer donned his own armor. He was still breathing hard. Something very odd here. When he was looking away, Hardesty ambled quietly over to the tool chest, palmed his gun, and clipped it onto his spacesuit. Marian saw the gesture, started to say something, and throttled her words. Maybe he was right. There was at least no harm in it.

Or in Gronauer. He might have been a little crazy by normal Earth standards, but what did those mean out here, three hundred million miles from the Sun? But he was not violent; he partook of the serene, timeless strength of the garden. A couple of hours' jaunt was not too much to please an old man trapped in a loneliness he himself no longer recognized.

THEY came out under a sky that was flashing ice and bitter dark, with a wan little sun low above ragged black stone. Gronauer led the way, a bounding figure of shadow and dazzling metal, now lost in a gully of night and now outlined grotesquely against the sprawl of stars. Hardesty swore at his speed, lengthened his own flat leaps, and felt rock and scree rattle beneath his boots.

They were moving into the far bleak eye of the Sun, faster than the planetoid's axial spin. As the stars reeled insanely backward and the Sun began to climb again, Hardesty had a sudden weird feeling that he was moving back in time. He choked it down and concentrated on picking his way through the jumbled, looming, crazily tilted stones, down riven gulches and up hillsides that were heaped slabs of igneous rock, a nightmare landscape of ruin and murk.

It was a zigzag path, he noticed dimly, leading into an area he had only skimmed through in his search, but he was too busy keeping up with Gronauer and watching Marian to think more deeply about it. His breath was harsh and loud in a suddenly hot spacesuit.

The Sun was halfway down to the opposite horizon when Gronauer went into another ravine

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and out of sight. Hardesty followed him, scrambled awkwardly down its steep sides, the undiffused glow of his flash picking boulders out like distorted faces. The crack was long and deep; he had to fumble in shadow for several minutes before he came out at the other end. Then he looked around.

He stood on a gigantic basalt block sloping off to the edge of the world, overhead and around him the stars and the rime-frost arch of the Milky Way, and he was alone.

"Gronauer!" His voice echoed rattling in his helmet. "Where the hell are you?"

Useless, of course. Gronauer didn't have a suit radio. But how the devil could he have gotten lost?

Marian came leaping out of the ravine and over to stand by him. Her breathing was as hard as his.

"What became of the old man?" she asked anxiously

"That's what I'd like to know. First he takes off like a bat out of Mars, and then he manages to lose us. Just went too fast? No, I was keeping up all right. He must have climbed the canyon wall ahead of me—I wouldn't have seen him—and taken off in some other direction."

"But why, Jim?"

"I don't know. He's mad, completely cracked, of course. Needs psychiatry in the worst way. But let the government worry about him. I'm fed up." Hardesty took a long stride forward. "Come on, let's get back to the ship."

"But he may just have made a mistake—"

"Then he can catch up with us and lead us properly. The hell with him."

"Well, he does seem a pretty hopeless case at that, doesn't he? The poor old man! I hope we see him again before we blast off."

Hardesty shrugged. "Personally, I don't give a hang. Now let's see, which way is the *Gold Rush?*"

"Why, I suppose—that way. Toward the Sun."

"We zigzagged quite a bit, remember." Hardesty's hand rang against his metal leg in a slap of exasperation. "Nuts! We're lost!"

"There's the asteroid's pole star, up there, dear, and the Sun was west of it at setting, so our general direction should be *that* way."

"Yeah. I hope it's not too general. Let's go."

They set off along the sloping hillside toward a razor-backed spine of rock, black against the Milky Way. Neither one said anything.

It was hard to orient yourself, if you didn't know every inch of the path. You had to twist and

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turn, picking a slow way across a narrow landscape of crags and gullies and craters, sometimes lost in darkness that was like a flowing liquid, sometimes blinded by the thin yet vicious sunlight directly in your eyes. There were no broad outlooks. Vision was bounded on every hand. Only the turning sky had depth.

Men had gotten lost on asteroids and wandered within a few miles of their ships till their oxygen gave out. It was not a comforting reflection. Hardesty shoved it resolutely out of his mind.

AFTER an hour or so, they passed a region of plant growth. Hardesty looked at the stretch of garden with a rising bitterness in him.

Low, silvery shrubs, lichenous growth spotting naked rock with red and brown and yellow, high, gaunt, yuccalike boles and gallows branches, sullen blood-crimson glow of heat bladders, huge, muscular roots plunging deep into the little world's iron heart, delicate faery tracing of vines looped and coiled between the shrubs, the throb and pulse of the garden's beating hearts—a reach of growth over the hills and out of sight, a frigid world made alive where no life should be, supreme triumph of organism over the chaotic waste of the frozen and hostile Universe —

But it was too alien. The eldritch forms only added to the strangeness and loneliness, and he hated them. He kicked viciously and saw the pulse of alarm ripple out through the garden and over the near horizon, leaves rustling and whispering in the windless vacuum of space, the garden talking to itself.

"Go ahead," he muttered. "Call your brain. That's all he is now, your brain and your hands. You've taken his soul away."

"Don't, Jim," said Marian. "Please don't."

"Oh, all right." He trudged in silence for a while before adding shamefacedly: "I'm being silly, I know. This is nothing but another instance of adaptation. Life on Earth is interdependent, too, a balance of nature. But I still don't like it."

The Sun crossed the sky again and lowered behind them. Hardesty glanced worriedly at his wrist chrono. They'd been out for a good two hours; their tanks didn't hold very much more air.

Don't get excited. That speeds up your metabolism, makes you burn oxygen all the faster, blunts the cool judgment you need. Take it easy. Slow and easy. Lots of time.

Sunset, and darkness like a steel shutter slammed tight. Nothing around them looked fa-

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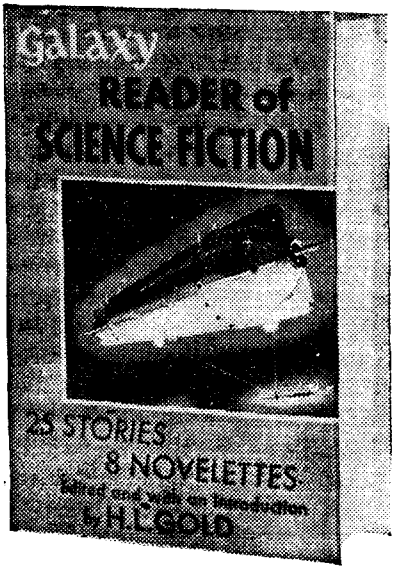

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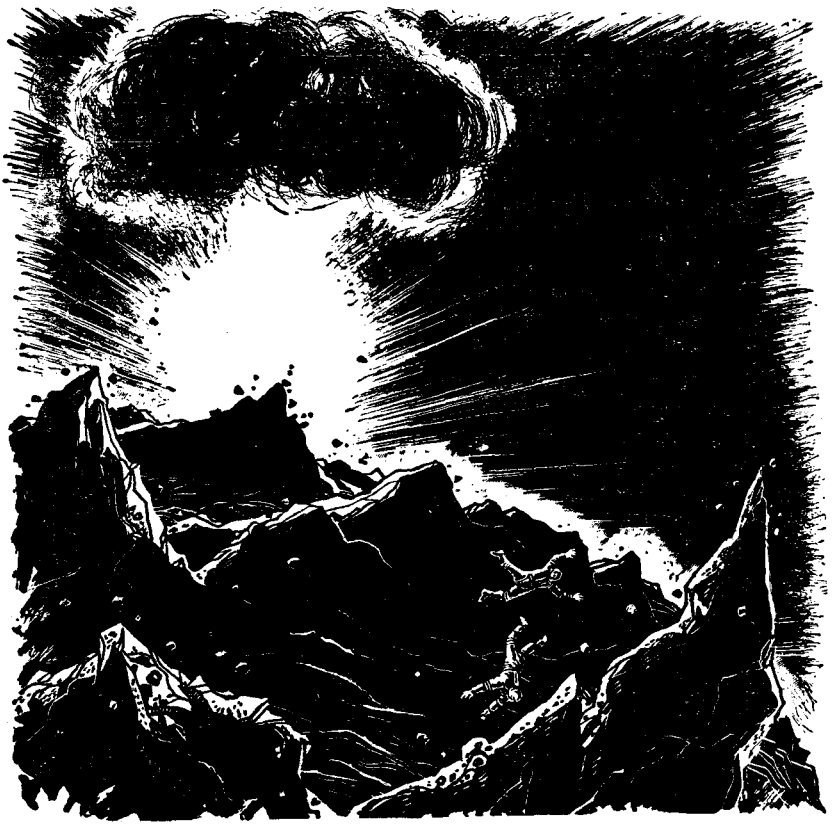

miliar yet. Rather, everything looked the same. All these leaning spires and tumbled boulders and gnarled old craters looked alike and there was no way home.

Marian's hand crept into his and he squeezed it, grateful for the touch of human nearness.

"According to the stars, we're in the neighborhood now," he said as unemotionally as possible. "We'd better follow a spiral path—"

Out of the corner of an eye, he saw the blue-white sheet of flame that spurted up over the horizon, saw it rising and spreading in a terrible brilliance that veiled the stars, and flung an arm across his eyes with a shout. The next moment the ground heaved and buckled under him, flung him

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spinning upward in the light gravity and bounced him against a lurching granite cliff, then tossed him back to the shaking, sundering rock below.

"Marian!" he cried. "Marian!"

The fire was gone, but half the sky was blotted from sight by a column of smoke and dust, climbing and climbing like a monster spirit let out of Solomon's flask, and the ground shivered and rumbled and boulders danced on its surface. Hardesty clung to the rocks, clawing himself into naked stone, and his own screaming was loud and mad in his ears.

"Jim! Are you all right, Jim?"

They stumbled toward each other, falling and struggling as earthquake waves raced around and around the tiny world. They locked arms and lay on the cracking ground together and looked wildly at the nightmare scenery.

THE seasick roll died away. A miniature landslide came down a hill slope, slowly in the acceleration of feeble gravity, the slowness of fleeing through clinging mud.

Hardesty and Marian got up and stumbled toward the black jinni which rose against the stars.

He felt drained of emotion, a machine moving wearily toward some destined end. He topped a ridge and looked with blank eyes at the ruin of his ship. It was

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scattered to the horizon and beyond, and the molten slag was still aglow beneath its resting place.

"Gronauer," he said, just that one word, but it held loathing for the castaway and for himself, the time and anxiety he had wasted trying to help someone who didn't want to be helped, but mostly for his stupidity.

Marian stared around. "Where?"

"Gronauer? I don't know. He gave us the slip and came back, wrecked the safety controls and blew up the nuclear pile of the ship."

"No," she said. "He wouldn't. It must have been a meteor."

"Not where I landed. A meteor would have had to come straight down to hit the ship. Even then, it wouldn't blow up the pile." He kicked savagely at a boulder, which flew off like a bird winging south. "Gronauer did it. You know that yourself."

"Why?" Marian's whisper, like a dim voice from across that gulf of space that winked and jeered at him with a million hostile eyes, was so faint that even in his earphones he could scarcely hear it. "*Why?*"

They saw the figure lurching up the slope toward them, hands dangling empty, the helmeted head overgrown with vines like an ancient Greek nature god. Hardesty drew his gun and rested it on his free elbow for steadiness.

"Jim! No!"

"Calm down," he said. "After what he did, I'm not taking any chances."

"Are you going to—kill him?"

"It's not a bad idea. He's insane, probably homicidal. We can't watch him all the time. . . ."

Gronauer must have seen the gun, but his slow pace did not slacken. One hand came up, tenderly caressing the vine that trailed off his shoulder.

Hardesty kept the gun level, but he did not fire, merely tensed his finger on the trigger when Gronauer suddenly broke into a staggering run toward them. Marian gripped Hardesty's arm.

The old man fell over a rock and tried to get up.

"First time I've seen him stumble," Hardesty said puzzledly, and lowered the gun. "Come on. The worst he can do is heave something at us. He's unarmed."

Gronauer was still trying to crawl toward them when they reached him. He stopped and rolled over on one side to look up at them. Blood and foam and twisted vines and tangled beard could not hide the smile on his battered lips.

Tears glistened on Marian's face in the keen starlight. Hardesty heard a sob in the radio and wanted to hold her close and

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tell it wasn't real, that it had never been real, and that the flame-colored woods of Earth's October lay just beyond the jagged, airless pinnacles. But he couldn't. Instead, he knelt when Gronauer motioned him closer, and put his helmet against the castaway's.

"Now you will have to stay," said Gronauer with feeble triumph. "I could not get away from the ship in time, but that does not matter. I am old and would have died soon. Then the garden would not have anyone to take care of it. Now it will."

"Killing yourself and marooning us for the sake of some lousy vegetation," Hardesty said bitterly. "I should have known you were crazy and taken off right away and sent help back to you."

Gronauer tried to shake his head. "Not crazy. You will gather the supplies that were not destroyed in the explosion and move into my cabin. You will read my notes and tend my plants . . . and become part of the symbiosis, as I was."

"I'd shoot Marian and myself first!"

"No, you will hope to be found by someone else. That hope will keep you from committing suicide. When you are ready to give up hoping, you will be—adjusted. You will like it here. This will be the home you were searching for; this will be your Earth. And you will have children—"

"So your damned garden can go on!"

Gronauer nodded and his smile grew wider even while his eyes lost their focus.

"The garden will go on," he said, just before his breath ceased altogether.

Hardesty stood up. Marian was clinging to him and her voice was insistent in his earphones, but he didn't hear her. He was looking at the stars, the bright stars which neither comforted nor mocked, being too remote to care, and the green of the plants in the distance, and he thought with a dull despair that even now it looked like New England in October.

—POUL ANDERSON

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